

THE BURGLINGS of TUTT



BY

R. ANDOM

AUTHOR OF

WE THREE AND TRODDLES
etc.




ILLUSTRATED BY
LOUIS GUNNIS.

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Nellie Barrett

~~MR~~ ANDERSON



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with love.

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"The man dropped everything, and bolted."—*p.* 109.

THE BURGLINGS OF TUTT.

BEING SOME EXPLOITS IN THE LIFE
OF AN EXPERT.

BY

R. ANDOM,

*Author of "We Three and Troddles," "Troddles and Us—and Others,"
"The Marvellous Adventures of Me," "Martha and I," "The Cruise
of the Mock Turtle," etc., etc.*



ILLUSTRATED BY LOUIS GUNNIS.

LONDON

JARROLD & SONS, 10 & 11, WARWICK LANE, E.C.

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“ When the enterprising burglar ain’t a burgling,
He loves to lie—— ”

Poems of *The Fancy*.

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PREFACE.

To the proprietors of the *People's Friend* of Dundee, *The Royal Magazine*, *Scraps*, and *Pearson's Weekly*, for their courtesy and kindness, by which I am enabled to place the adventures of a quondam friend before the public in this form, my thanks are due.

A man's best friend, according to the gentlemen who make songs for the delectation of the Halls, is his mother-in-law. I will back a friendly editor or a generous newspaper proprietor against her any day, and of this quality are the gentlemen who preside over the respective destinies of the journals in which these "memoirs" were first given publicity.

R. ANDOM.

Press Club, 1905.

THE BURGLINGS OF TUTT.

CHAP. I.

A WOMAN OF CRAFT.

I HAD the following story, with a good many others, from a gentleman who knew more about the art of "crib cracking" from inside than he would have cared to acknowledge to a casual acquaintance. He was a burglar, or rather, to be exact, he had been. He was very particular about emphasizing the "ex," and it was not for me to dispute it with him. He is a wise man who knows his own profession, and in the matter of such professions as burglary he is a wiser, who sees the error of his ways and puts himself in a position to speak of his exploits in the past tense, lest, peradventure, he court present tribulation and future hard labour.

He was a man of medium height, gaunt and grey, and shabby. I judged him to be about forty. He could not have been less, though he might easily have been more.

We were up in Mac's studio, where I had led my quondam acquaintance, after an informal introduction on the Embankment, affected by his first trying to pick my pocket, and then, finding that futile, endeavouring to raise a loan from me.

The man was obviously down on his luck, and I wasn't over severe, and paid very little attention to the morality of the thing. If I were as wet and cold and hungry and helpless as he I wouldn't guarantee anything on my own account. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and taking quite a rigid view of the case I had to allow that it amounted to nothing much beyond that.

Besides there was "copy" in the man, if I could only get him to talk, and that justifies any eccentricity in a journalist. So, as I have stated, I took the man up to Mac's room, and found him in food and drink and light and warmth, and then with a cheerful accompaniment of Scotch and tobacco I gleaned my reward.

"What have I done? Oh! most things," replied my pet burglar, who wasn't so much "ex" as he would have preferred me to believe.

"Including time?" said I, slyly.

"Some of that, certainly," acknowledged Mr. Tutt; "but there is worse things than quod, and you don't need to belong to the fancy to strike them either."

"And what," said I diplomatically, "is there worse than the social penance kept for evil livers that you have met with in your experience?"

"Women," was the extraordinary reply, given with such vicious emphasis that, ungallant as it sounded, there was no possible doubt concerning its depth and sincerity.

"Tell me all about it," said I, pursuing the subject, and really anxious to know the reason for so much venomous acridity towards a whole sex, which, in the abstract, at least, one would have expected to find



"What have I done? Oh! most things."—*p.* 14.

warmly appreciated by those who live best by reason of its fondness for portable valuables, which is woman's distinctive peculiarity.

"It was some years ago," began my shady acquaintance, "when I was fresh to the business. I had natural aptitude, and did very well from the start, too, because when you get in the way of it, burglary has

attractions which I suppose you have no idea of—all the pleasure of speculation, you know, with a dash of excitement. You may get a big haul, or you may get three years, and you're rather interested in finding out what it's going to be.

"The first crib is painful cracking, because the odds don't seem at all equal, and you have a feeling in the stomach worse than any sort of sea-sickness, and are funky enough to shy at a blue-bottle. I've known fellows plucky enough to face a Judge, and take three years without wincing, leaving a bag full of swag and slope off at the tapping of a branch against a window."

"I should feel a bit like that myself," I acknowledged. "But concerning the worse things?"

"Yes, that were a do if you like," agreed my guest. "I had got my hand well in by then, and, working by myself, was getting down to a very profitable and fairly easy time of it, when I came across a dead easy plant which fairly made you ache to tackle it.

"It was a fine, double-fronted show out Hendon way, with a good bit of ground round it, and treed and bushed in front to hide you from anyone passing along the road. It was easy to see that there was any amount of good stuff to be had for the lifting, and not a soul on the premises, barring the old chap who kept it, and a girl who might have been his daughter. There was a man who looked after the ground and did odd jobs, but he slept off the premises, and a boy who came in to do

knives and windows. Of course, he didn't count at all, and the thing fairly made me smile at the simplicity of it.

"It took me the best part of a week to find out all I needed to know, and then I watched for a favourable night, and cracked the show; and a bitter, bad, rotten lot it proved.

"The night I picked on couldn't have been better if I'd made it on purpose. It was winter time, and one of the thickest fogs we'd had was hanging round, upsetting the traffic, and fairly making the fortunes of men like myself.

"I went down to the place early in the day, and hung about the Harp to pass the time; but one thing and another kept me back, and it was gone ten when I sneaked up to the house I had marked, and hid myself in a clump of bushes in the front garden. It was raw, cold work marking time in that dismal fog, and I kept my eye on the light in the upstairs window with a growing impatience. It seemed as if the old fool never would douse the glim and go to sleep; but it went out at last, and I moved round to the back of the house to take stock. There was a handy little scullery window which I had picked on, and they hadn't even taken the trouble to fasten it—not that it would have mattered if they had; but it would have looked a bit less contemptuous like if some attempt had been made to keep us out.

"Anyhow, it wasn't for me to grumble, and I nipped

inside, and, finding my way to the kitchen, sat down in front of the bit of fire that was left to let the house settle before I commenced operations. I wasn't in too much hurry to meet my Circe, you see ! ”

“ Your what ? ” I queried, in blank astonishment.

“ My Circe,” he nodded. “ Oh, yes ! I had ambitions when I began, and my education was arranged for a different walk in life. Wait a minute, and we'll come to that. I waited myself till well after a clock in the house chimed one, and I was in plenty of time even then.

“ The lower rooms proved a bit disappointing on investigation. There was a fair quantity of plate and oddments which would pay for removal, but the bulk of the stuff was of a too solid and substantial sort. With a mate and a horse and van it would have been a Klondike, but that was not in my line, and I had to estimate strictly on what was pocketable. The idea of burying the silver in the front somewhere, and fetching it on another trip, came to me, and I put up a pile of it for that purpose, unless the rooms above panned out so fairly as to make the plan superfluous and risky.

“ I gained the upper floor and went through the rooms systematically, and what I saw there fairly staggered my ideas. Why, man, there was no less than four rooms chock-a-block with spoil—silver tied up in bundles, watches and clocks, jewellery lying about in heaps, paintings of immense value—stood about in odd corners, or were left lying on the floor, and the lot

covered with dust and dirt, and looking as neglected as the stock of a rag and bone merchant.

"I couldn't fathom it at all unless the owner was one of those dreary, old, miserly cranks who hoard up things for the simple pleasure of hoarding; but I can tell you I made several strides towards my first plan of getting a pal with a conveyance, and organising a



"Don't move," said a voice, in quiet, even tones.—*p.* 17.

regular loot. There was stuff enough chucked about these rooms alone to set half a dozen of us up for years to come.

"Just to go on with, I pocketed a handful of miscellaneous trifles which would turn over a cool thousand in the hands of the rascalliest Jew fence in London, and if I had had any luck I should have gone out there and

then, and been satisfied with my night's work. Curiosity as much as anything, I think, determined me to have a squint at the owner of the house, and on my way back I pushed open his door and sneaked in. I didn't get very far, for a broad beam of light suddenly shot into my face and blinded me, so that I could do nothing but stand and blink.

"‘Don't move,’ said a voice pleasantly, in quiet, even tones. ‘You've been a long time coming up ; but I am pleased to see you all the same. Got a revolver? Oh, don't trouble to swear ; it isn't your fault, you know. Throw it behind you and no tricks. I've got you covered !’

"I did as I was told, and did it smartly. There was a nasty ring in that voice which sort of indicated that prompt obedience would be beneficial to my health.

"As my barker struck the wall behind me the light was shifted from my eyes, and I had my first glimpse of Circe.

"A handsome, fair, girlish face, wearing a smile of amused contempt, which set me swearing again, showed up over the pile of bedclothes. That and a revolver covering me was what I saw, and I can tell you that the beauty of the sight didn't go far to soothe my funk.

"‘All right, I'm done,’ said I.

"‘I have not,’ she retorted. ‘In fact, I've only just begun.’

"I wasn't wanting any amusement just then, and I

swore a bit more, and told the girl to call in the cops and get it over. I didn't mind five years so much just then, as I did standing like a fool in that room to make sport for a chit of a woman, with a barker which I wasn't even sure she could use properly. It was too lop-sided for my taste, and the girl had a nasty jeering way of speaking, although she seemed so quiet and pleasant, that I felt worse than I have ever felt before or since.

"'Turn your face to the wall, and don't be in a hurry,' said she.

"I obeyed and heard her get out of bed, and then the rustle of garments. 'Put out your hands, together—straight behind you, so,' and before I knew what she was up to I was handcuffed.

"'That's the style,' said she. 'Now, take a seat while I get a few more things on. I won't ring for a maid, or for my guardian.'

"She pushed a chair under me, and I sat down, limp as a rag, with my face still to the wall, and waited while she dressed herself. She didn't hurry in the slightest, but just went round messing about with this and that, and brushing her hair and combing it out, as if she was getting herself up for an evening party.

"'Sorry to keep you waiting,' she said, for about the twentieth time; and then I got wild. I told her to fetch in the police and have done with it.

"'You're mighty anxious for the police. Any one

would think that they were your special friends,' said she pleasantly. 'Don't worry. I can manage my affairs without assistance, thanks. But since you're anxious to get away, I'll come to business. In the first place, though you mayn't believe me, I'm very glad to see you. You've been a long time bringing the job off. I expected you a couple of days ago—you know the day you called, about the gas wasn't it, or the water?—and discovered that handy little pantry window out back.'

" 'Then I've been "shopped," I suppose,' said I.

" 'Not at all,' retorted she, coolly. 'Besides, you work single. The fame of such a skilful gentleman as yourself—Tutt, isn't it? Christian name William—lawyer's clerk, discharged for embezzlement, and relieved from prosecution by a mistaken sense of generosity to an old servant—travels, you know. But to come to business. What do you offer for your freedom?'

" 'Offer?' I stammered. It sounded like a proposal, though it wasn't leap year.

" 'Yes, offer,' she retorted. 'I am not keen on prosecuting you, and I loathe the police as a body just a trifle less than the rascally swindling crew who fatten in the Courts. But, all the same, you can't expect to go clear for nothing, you know. What value do you set on yourself?'

" 'I've only a couple of quid about me, miss, of my own,' said I, hopefully, for I thought I began to see her drift. Commend me to a woman when she is mean for

making a bit out of everything that comes along. It was just a question of terms.

“‘That’ll do for expenses,’ said she, coolly going through my pockets, and digging out, besides her own jewels, every single article of value I had about me, watch and chain and all. ‘Shock to the feelings, loss of sleep, etc., we’ll set them against your bits of property and call it even. Now, what about your liberty—how much do you offer for that?’

“‘A hundred, miss,’ I suggested. Of course, I wasn’t going to spring anything really; but I thought if I could pretend to fall in with her so as to get away, the matter of a mere pound or two wouldn’t count for much in promise.

“‘A hundred,’ said she, mighty pleasant still. ‘Twenty a year for five years; why, you’d be worth more than that as cat’s meat. Come, come, my friend, bid up like a man, Tutt, the clever house breaker, is worth more than a paltry hundred, surely!’

“‘Fix it yourself, and be hanged to you,’ said I, savagely.

“‘That’s rude,’ said she, mockingly. ‘Five hundred pounds, then, not to haggle about it.’

“‘Five hundred devils,’ I shouted. ‘Why, it’s blackmail, out and out. How do you suppose I’m to get such a preposterous sum, even if I wanted to.’

“‘In the same old sweet way, William Tutt,’ said she. ‘Don’t get excited. You’ll have to curtail your expenses—practise economy and all that sort of thing,

you know. Even then you will live a better and more wholesome life than they'll arrange for you at Dartmoor. Nasty hard place, Dartmoor—living's bad, accommodation's bad, and the quarries are cruelly hard on a man who is tender about the hands. Come now, I think, all things considered, I'm letting you off lightly. If I weren't so kind-hearted, I'd say an even thousand ; but I'll take the half, since I proposed the terms myself. No haggling now ; do you accept or not ?'

" 'All right, miss,' I grumbled. 'I'll have to get it first, so I suppose you'll let me have grace for a week or so.'

" 'No hurry, take a month—take six,' said she.

" 'Then,' said I, looking hopefully towards the door, 'I may go, I suppose ?'

" 'Come, come, my friend, don't be childish,' she retorted, and I began to notice that her manner wasn't quite so soft and friendly.

" 'There was an incisiveness about it which gave me an undefinable impression that I was still a good way from being out of the hole.

" 'If you really cannot put up the money,' she continued, in her snakey, suggestive way that made me sick to sit and listen to, 'I'll substitute service for cash. Let us say a month—that is, for one month from date, you'll give me the advantage of your professional skill in return for board and lodging, and compounding that little matter of burgling my premises, of course.'

" 'Why, you are nothing but——'

“‘A burglar by proxy, quite so,’ she admitted genially. ‘It’s less troublesome and wearing to the nerves; and it pays better, too. It’s a system with me, my dear Tutt, and I flatter myself that I have reduced it to an absolute science.’

“Well, to make a long story short, I kicked, and finding that of precious little use, I protested, and argued, and at last pleaded, and finished up by agreeing to the terms.”

“And,” said I, interested, “what was the upshot?”

“Just what you might expect,” was the response, with an ugly emphasis. “For a month I was missing, and my pals made dead certain that I had got lagged under another name. As a matter of fact I had; and pretty galling it was, I can tell you. The living was good enough I am not denying, and the woman who had muzzled me was companionable enough for some tastes; but if you want to know what Hades is like, just get under the thumb of a woman like that for four weeks, and you’ll have a pretty fair idea.”

“Oh, it doesn’t sound bad,” I objected. “You might have had five years under several thumbs on your own showing, which would have been considerably worse.”

“In a sense, yes, or I’d have taken it,” he admitted grudgingly. “But that would have been more in the way of business. One thing, you could have been sure they weren’t making much out of you, while—how much do you reckon I brought in during that month?”

"Couldn't say," said I.

"Over five thousand pounds, and all in good portable stuff that could be handled without difficulty."

"I wanted to pay the five hundred and cry off at that when I had done my first job. She simply laughed in my face, and held on to the bargain. I had the rarest of luck, too, and I am not saying that she wasn't more cunning and clever than the whole batch of burglars in London put together; but it was galling, night after night, to rake out a small fortune, and have it annexed without so much as 'by your leave.'

"And when I had done my month, she kicked me over the doorstep like a dog. Told me to amend my ways, and take to honest employment, however humble—and she wouldn't spring me a quid out of it all to pay my fare back, and if I hadn't hung on to one or two odds and ends and a bit of spare cash which I came across in my raids, I'd have been fairly up a tree."

"Well," said I, after a lengthy pause, "seeing that it was in your line of business, I think you would have done as well to have continued the connection—on a more equitable arrangement, of course."

"I did think of that," he admitted. "In fact, I proposed it during my servitude, and proposed to the girl at the same time, but she just laughed that jarring laugh that used to fill me with a longing to strangle her.

"She had got one husband already, she said, jeeringly, and I somehow got an impression that it was true,

although he was not likely to come home for a year or two.

"I never saw the old man who I had stupidly supposed owned the house; but when I went back there some time later, and found the place empty, and the tenant gone, everybody of whom I could inquire knew nothing of a young lady. In fact they denied that there had been any young lady. It is my belief that the girl was both a born actress and the craftiest and coolest criminal in London. If I had only dared, I would much have liked to go round to a few of the houses I had broken into under her direction."

"You think——" I suggested.

"That she had more than one home," replied my companion. "Somewhere she was a smart and fashionable woman, mixed up with the swell crowd. At Hendon she was the old, mean recluse that I had seen with my own eyes, and everybody believed lived in the house."

"I was always suspicious of the wonderful knowledge she had of the places I visited, and of the kind and value of the stuff to be found in them, and I have an impression that out of their visiting acquaintances I could identify one who was known to me in a very different capacity."

CHAP. II.

LIMITED LUCK.

"**T**HE trouble with you people is that you get a sort of story book idea of us—expect to find us all marked and labelled 'Bill Sikes,' to be recognised on sight, and run in on suspicion," said Mr. Tutt, in answer to a casual reference I had made concerning the fraternity to which he once belonged.

"It might have been a bit like that once, but it ain't so now, and any smart detective put before a couple of suspects will pick out the demure and innocent for preference. I knew a chap once who was in our line. He began as a commercial traveller, and he would have finished the same way in all likelihood, if a smarter man hadn't cleared him out of stock and cash, at a time when he couldn't show up empty-handed without leaving a very nasty suspicion behind."

"I know," said I, thoughtfully. "The sort of thing that happens when a tradesman on the brink of bankruptcy has a fire—too lucky to be quite natural."

"That's it," agreed my companion, with a satisfied nod of his head, as though he were pleased on the whole to find me so intelligent.

"Well, he was invited to resign, and, having nothing else to turn to, he took to the jemmy, and made a lucrative speciality of small jewellers' places about the provinces. But I was going to say, he was one of the quietest, most gentlemanly sort of fellows you could possibly meet. You would at sight have set him down for an assurance agent, and rather expect to hear that he filled in his time on Sundays with a class at a Sunday School.

"It was with him that I had one of the funniest adventures that ever came my way, too."

"Tell us about it," said I promptly. "It will be a novelty. I always thought life was grim and life was earnest in your line. To discover that it has moments of mirth and intervals of merriment might, should I ever find myself pressed, secure it my attention as a possible field of enterprise."

Tutt shrugged his shoulders, partly to indicate his disapproval of my levity, and partly, I believe, to emphasize the very unflattering opinion he had formed of my capacity of gaining anything that way save six months' hard. However, he refrained from commenting on what was at worst but a dim and remote possibility, and in obedience to urgent pressure on my part he continued.

"It was in a big town in the Midlands that this

happened. I won't give it a name, for very good reasons, but you may be able to place it, and it was there that I picked up this chap I was telling you about. He was working his way up towards London; I had worked my way down for the usual reason that the change of surroundings would be beneficial to my health and prospects.

"I had found a very likely show outside the town, and was intending to see if I could do anything there, just to keep my hands in and put something in my pockets, because travelling comes expensive.

"Well, I didn't carry it through for two reasons. The first, and best, was that before I could put it in hand I had the luck to run across a man coming out of the Central Station as I was going in to get a lift out to the scene of operations. I mistook him for a 'tec,' and I thought it healthier and cheaper taking it all the way round to let that show alone. I knew these chaps and their ways fairly well, and though they ain't Sherlock Holmes', they are no fools. If that show got cracked, he'd tumble at once and fix me with it without any trouble for all that he looked through me as though he didn't know me from Adam, and didn't want to. That's their way."

"I see," said I thoughtfully. "And what was the second reason? You mentioned two."

"The other chap had cleared it out the night before," said Mr. Tutt, with a grin. "It wasn't altogether in his

general line of work, but it was such a dead easy thing that it seemed sinful to let it go by. He told me that, for he was an awful chap to talk about his work. And when he heard that I had had it marked for myself, he was quite concerned, and offered me a loan, or to stand in with him on another job to put things square.

"I said I'd take that if necessary, but anyway, I'd have to clear off, and sharp now; and I told him about my meeting that 'tec.' That made him sit up, and since it was likely enough that we had been seen about together, we agreed to skip that part, and lay low until we saw which way the cat would jump. He was mortally afraid of 'tecs,' he was.

"We got on to the Rugby road that evening, and stopped at a little wayside house that looked quiet and safe enough for our purpose. Fortunately for us, we didn't stay inside it. I took a look in first, and there was that 'tec' sitting there before a glass of whisky and water, as comfortable and easy as you please.

"There was a bike standing by the side of the door, a high-class affair, and I put two and two together and concluded that we had better go on and try a cross country route.

"'Why not pinch it?' said my pal, all of a sudden. 'It's rotten walking, and I've had enough. Besides, I know where we could raise a few quid on that little lot.'

"We were standing back in the shadow of the house, and while I was considering this risky but

enticing proposal another chap came up to the inn on a machine, pitched it down as though he was anxious to lose sight of it, and got inside.

“‘They’ll follow us on that,’ said I.

“‘Let’s take them both, then,’ said Larky, who was up to anything. ‘It’s as good as the other, and it’ll fetch as much, and help us out as well. You can ride, can’t you?’

“I could, and it didn’t take us long to trot those machines across the grass until we got well away from the inn, and drift off into the night with them.

“We had covered about a couple of miles when we overtook a neat little turn-out, with another hitched up to the back, which was being driven by a youngish fellow, who was singing away as though he saw a merry life through the bottom of half-a-dozen glasses of good old country ale.

“‘They’d fetch more than bikes,’ said Larky, thoughtfully, ‘and they wouldn’t be looking for us in them. Come on.’

“We pelted hard along the road for about half a mile until we came to a desolate-looking place, with a dirty old pool standing back on the road under a clump of trees.

“‘This’ll do,’ said Larky, jumping down; ‘in with them.’ And he up with his machine and slung it fair into the middle of the slime. The lamp hissed as the water touched it, and another short hiss marked the passage of mine to join it.

"‘There’s fish for some one,’ said Larky, with a grin. ‘Now let’s go and get our traps.’

"We walked back along the road, and soon heard the wheels of the two turn-outs making towards us.

"The chap was driving very slow and easy, and, letting him pass us, Larky ran up and unfastened the reins of the one behind. It was pitch dark, and the row the chap in the trap was making helped to cover the trick, though Larky was artful enough to lead the nag along so as not to stop the rattle of the wheels too suddenly. He let the distance gradually increase, and then he turned the nag round and jumped up into the seat and drove off down the road. It fairly knocked me, and I



"‘This’ll do,’ said Larky, ‘in with them.’—*p.* 32.

stood gaping after him without offering to move. Then I thought—‘That’s all right, but where do I come in?’ I couldn’t see that I should come in

at all unless I made a move for myself, so I made one by yelling out to the chap in the trap ahead.

"I didn't need to explain anything, for the chap took it all in at one glance. He started swearing, and jumped down and set off in pursuit, yelling and cursing as he ran. It was better luck than I had expected. I nipped up in his place, and was away with my little lot before the driver was a dozen yards off. 'A



"He wanted to run both ways at once."—*p.* 34.

fool and his cart are soon parted,' thinks I, and I could hardly drive for laughing; it was such a saucy go-off. And it was made funnier by the chap who was footing the bill. When he heard the wheels of my lot he started back for me, then he stopped and did another spurt towards Larky. He wanted to run both ways at once, and finding he couldn't he didn't run at all, but stood there between us and used such

awful language that I had to whip up to get out of sound of it.

"I took the first cross-road I came to, and drove along that, and then I got fairly lost. You see I didn't know the country a bit, and after I got off the main road into those twisting lanes with not a house or a soul upon them, I didn't know whether I was making for London or heading west or north. I didn't care much, but it was an odd thing all the same that after driving up one lane and down another I should come slap on Larky. He was in the same fix, and was more than a bit glad to see me, and still more surprised to find me as well fitted out as himself. He had reckoned on me keeping close to him, and, of course, when he found I hadn't he couldn't very well wait for me or drive back and pick me up. When I told him how I had set the chap after him and sneaked the other trap as soon as he got out of it, he almost tumbled off the seat with laughing.

"That was all right enough, but, as I reminded him, we were still a good way off being safe, and in the morning that part of the country would prove of no particular benefit to us to be caught in.

"‘That's so,’ said Larky, sobering up again. ‘We've got to get away first, and then get these off our hands at our convenience. Our best show is to go on for a mile or two and put up for the night at the first house we come across. We'll leave about six, and do it then easy enough. It can't be more than a

dozen miles to D——, where I fancy we can get rid of this little lot at a profit.'

"'We may as well do the mile or so in the right direction any way,' said I, agreeing to the plan, which was as good a one as we could adopt. 'I'll nip out at the first cottage we come to and inquire.'

"'And have them put the "tecs" on our track as soon as the bills are out—not much; you won't,' said Larky. 'We'll have to take our chance with what assistance we can get from the finger-posts. Some of them are bound to show the Rugby or London roads, and they'll do. Anyway we don't want London or B——, and that'll be some guide.'

"So we drove for nigh on a couple of hours, and then, without having the ghost of an idea where we were, we came on a good-sized old country inn, and there Larky said we'd stop and take our chance.

"We went inside to have a look round just before putting up, after giving the nags a drink and putting on their bags. There was only a few old bumpkins in the tap, and we had a drink and inquired if there was any accommodation to be had.

"The landlord said he'd see what they could do for us, and by-and-by he came back and told us that we could have a room.

"We stopped there a good while smelling round on the quiet to find out the lay of the land. Larky gave out that we were commercials, and managed to let slip that we were working back towards B——.

"We didn't hurry ourselves, wishing to appear easy and unconcerned in our minds, and we stopped there drinking and chatting with the landlord and the customers till closing time.

"Larky seemed satisfied enough, but I couldn't get over a feeling that things weren't straight, and at last, to get away from my silly fears, I pretended to be dead tired, and suggested that we have a bit of supper and get off to bed.

"The landlord got us some cold meat and fixings in the coffee-room, and sat down and smoked with us while we ate it. He seemed a simple, straightforward old chap, and we pumped him for some useful information, including the fact that we must have taken a sort of circular tour in our drives, for we were putting up within a mile or two of the very place where we had sneaked these traps.

"‘I shall have to put you in with another gent,’ said the landlord when he had almost finished. ‘It’s a big room, so you won’t mind that. My youngster has a cot in the same room.’

"‘It sounds a bit crowded,’ said Larky, in his careless, jolly way, ‘but I reckon we can make out well enough.’

"He and the landlord settled down again to jaw after supper, so I took my candle and went up to the room which the servant pointed out. It was a big, rambling, old-fashioned barn, with heavy beams, and the rough walls all cock-eyed, and a couple of

those diamond-paned windows which open on hinges in regular last century style.

"The chap who was sharing it with us was sitting on his bed smoking when I entered, and he didn't seem particularly well pleased to see me. There seemed something oddly familiar about him, too; but I couldn't recall having met him before, and, seeing that he wasn't inclined to talk, I lit my pipe and waited for Larky to come up. It was the best part of an hour before I heard him tell the landlord to give us a call about six, as we wanted to be away early, and then he came tumbling in.

" 'Been making up my books,' says he, for the benefit of our stable chum.

"As soon as he spoke the other chap stood up in a sort of excited way, and, mumbling something about having forgotten something or other, he grabbed up his things and fairly bolted.

"Larky stared at me, and then he went across on tip-toe and tried the door.

" 'It's locked,' he muttered angrily. 'Just what I expected. You recognised him?'

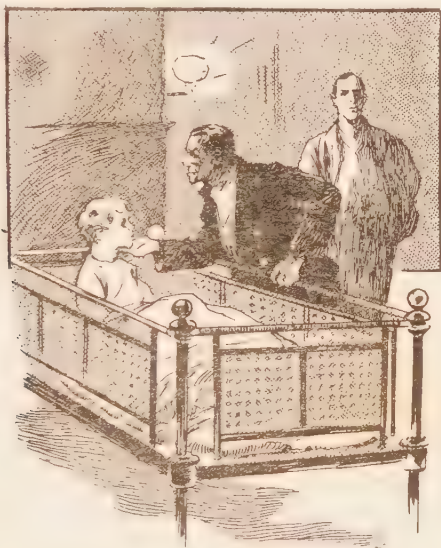
" 'I thought I did,' said I. 'He ain't no "tec," is he?'

" 'Worse than that,' said Larky; 'it's the chap we stole the carts from.'

"Jumping Moses! But I froze up then, I can tell you.

" 'That's a bit of all right,' said I; 'but perhaps he won't recognise us.'

“‘Then what did he scuttle for? Don’t you make any error,’ retorted Larky. ‘These sort of chaps ain’t exactly the kind to have their fixings stolen without filling every pub. in the neighbourhood with it. If you ask me, he has been on to us from the first—belongs to the show, very likely, and we’ve just driven his property home for him.’



“‘Hello, sonny,’” said Larky.—*p.* 40.

“‘Steady on,’ I whispered, and Larky, following my nod, saw that the landlord’s kiddy, a curly-headed little chap of about four, was sitting up in bed staring at us with a pair of big eyes propped open as far as they would go.

“‘Hello, sonny,’ said Larky, going over to the cot and chucking the youngster under his chin. ‘You don’t know who we are, do you? We’re that old chap who comes down the chimneys with toys and sweeties for good little boys. You are a good little boy, of course.’

“‘Chrisams ’oo do,’ said the kid, solemnly.

“‘Oh! we’re the every-day kind,’ said Larky. ‘You lay down and shut your eyes, and keep quite still, and you will find something ever so nice on your bed in the morning.’

“‘A puffer?’ asked the youngster, his eyes getting wider than ever.

“‘Yes, a real, fine puffer, that goes along by itself and says, “Choo, choo,” and whistles,’ said Larky, recklessly; and to my relief the kiddie ducked under the clothes while we took a rapid survey of the position.

“It wasn’t any too encouraging; but Larky had been in more than one tight place, he told me, and he felt equal to this.

“‘The chimney’s our mark,’ said he. ‘Knot up a couple of them blankets and drop them out of the window. Tie up one end to that bed-post, and leave the window wide open. They’ll guess we’ve gone out that way, being in a hurry, and not anxious to stop to say good-bye. The chimney is our show. It’s big enough to hide us if they’ll only come to the conclusion we have cut our lucky, and we must just

lay down until the hunt is over, and get away in the small hours. We'll have to abandon the traps, but if we have any luck we can take their value in cash.'

"'Why not go by the window straight off?' I objected.

"'Because it's watched,' said Larky, shortly. 'If we did try it we'd be spotted for a cert; but if they find evidence of the fact and we're gone, they'll agree that they were caught napping. It isn't what you do, but what you can make them believe you have done, that tells in these cases. Douse the glim and come on. It's a matter of years for us if we are taken, and I don't feel to need such an extensive holiday as that just now.

"It was a tight squeeze getting through, but once behind the stove there was a tidy sized cupboard of bare brick, and filthy dirty, and we flattened ourselves against the nearest wall and waited. We stood and waited, shifting our position, as we got cramped by long standing, until we were in a state of frantic longing for the police to come; but they didn't come, and after a bit we sat down to it.

"'It seems a bit out somewhere,' muttered Larky, thoughtfully. 'I wonder what time it is. We should have been able to have cleared by now, and, hang me, if I wouldn't have chanced it if I'd thought they would have been half as long. What ho! here they are!'

"We heard the door being shaken, and then a voice remarked on the fact of its being bolted. The bolt was drawn, and, peeping through, I could see the landlord, candle in hand, standing in the doorway staring into the room in blank surprise.

"He went over and looked at his youngster first (which was what he had come for, we subsequently discovered), and then he spotted the open window and the blanket rope leading out of it. Then he started to raise Cain!

"'Bilked, by thunder, and by all three!' he muttered, and shot out of the room as though he were in a hurry over something. He came back with the odd man of the house.

"'They've cut, Bill,' we could hear him say as he stood on the landing and explained things to his assistant. 'The till's cleared as well, I make no doubt. They wouldn't do that just to dodge a five bob account. Saddle up Bob, and take a look at things outside while I go through the rooms. You'll have to ride into town for the police, I expect.'

"Master and man cleared out and left us completely flummuxed.

"'Well, strike me handsome if I know what to make of this little lot,' said Larky. 'It's pretty clear that the landlord doesn't know anything of our caper. S'elp me never if I don't think we have been sold, after all. Anyhow, we've got to see it through now.'

"'Both traps there, and not a thing touched in

the house. There's something queer about this,' was the next thing we heard. The landlord had come back to take another look round. 'You'd best go in to the station and put them on the track, Bill.'

"Bill went, followed by the landlord, and, giving me the tip, Larky nipped back into the room. Slipping off our boots, we stole outside and along the corridor, and as soon as the coast was clear we nipped downstairs and got cover in the stables, packed away behind some trusses of hay.

"Larky badly wanted to swear, but he didn't feel able to do anything like justice to the thing, and as for me, I couldn't think of anything strong enough to suit the occasion. Taking it all round, it was the rottenest night and the rottenest job I ever put in, and as far as we could judge it hadn't been a bit necessary.

"And we weren't through with it. By the time we had got cramped and stuffy again in our new position the stableman came back with a police officer, and we were very well placed to find out just what awful fools we had made of ourselves.

"The sergeant was short enough in shutting up the landlord on the matter of his own loss, but he took a great interest in the traps we had come in.

" 'Stolen from Tassels' yesterday morning, they were,' we heard him explain, and he started questioning.

"I hope the description he got of us was useful to him. I didn't recognise anybody from it myself,

and I was in a pretty good condition to judge. The officer went over the place, taking notes, and left the pub. just as the morning began to break. We gave him a quarter of an hour to get well clear, and then in the hard, cold light of daybreak, two dirty, disreputable-looking chaps, without hats, footed it heavily across country and got into safe hiding by mid-day, dead beat, and hungry enough to eat a fried donkey.

"I expected Larky to be tearing mad when we reckoned up how we had allowed ourselves to be jockeyed out of our property. I was myself. But he just sat and laughed and laughed until I thought he'd have a fit or something. And then he risked getting copped by going off to the nearest town and buying the biggest toy engine he could get, and spent the rest of the evening in packing it up for that big-eyed kid belonging to the landlord.

"We went back the next day and fished out them bikes we had shied into the pond. It wasn't a prime job either, but it seemed sinful not to make something out of the deal. Larky rode his right up to London, and got four quid for it. I rode mine into D—, and got six months for sneaking it. And the chap I had sneaked it from wasn't a 'tec' at all, but one of the biggest thieves in London, who had come down in the guise of an insurance agent on a holiday to see his people."

CHAP. III.

THE KIDNAPPED "COPPER."

"**A** COPPER is a slop, you know," explained Mr. Tutt kindly.

"I know," said I nodding.

"Well, I kidnapped him," continued my visitor, a reformed burglar I had interviewed in the way of business, "and this is how it came about."

"I was doing a job at a place down in Essex, and not a mighty way from London either, though a bit too far to walk of an evening. It was a nice, tidy little drum, owned by an old chap, who dabbled on the Exchange in between dancing attendance on a young wife he hadn't had long enough to get tired of.

"I had watched the place on and off for nigh on a month, and one of the first things I learnt was that the lady spent a lot of her time in town, and he chose to, or had to, accompany her, so that once or twice in every week the house was just left to the care of a couple of flighty girls and a deaf old housekeeper, who went to bed at nine and stopped there till eight the next

morning. Couldn't have had it better if I had made it on purpose.

"I got myself up spry and natty and made up to those girls indiscriminate. I had a taking sort of way with women in those days, and it wasn't long before I was on good terms with both, and having the free run of the place when the cats were in London and in bed respectively, and the coast was clear.

"It isn't such an easy job as it sounds to make the running with a couple of young women like that without getting things tied in a tangle. If you hook them both they are as jealous and nasty as a couple of cats with one dish of milk between them, and if you fix on one the other will be bound to drop off and spoil your game by some unexpected move on her own.

"I knew a chap who got ten years that very way. He was working a similar job where there was two servants, and instead of playing up to both, he fixed on the housemaid and spread himself about her. The other girl ran along in harness quite nicely until this happened, and then she reverted to the police-sergeant. The very night Jim had set to do the trick, in consequence, he found himself sitting down in the kitchen with the very man he most wanted to avoid. He worked the business through, but having a short memory, and the policeman having a long one, he got pulled for it and was lagged for a ten-year stretch.

"I managed my tandem better than that, and for near a month I had the pair of them hanging round as

devoted as you could wish, and not even beginning to get jealous over the situation. Eh?"

"I merely remarked that you seem to have to do rather a lot in your line of business," said I, cynically.

"Yes, but the pay's pretty good," retorted Mr. Tutt, cheerfully.

"Still, it did begin to pall, and, besides, I was a bit anxious to attend to another job I was nursing at Streatham, so I resolved to finish up on the next square opening that offered. It was the same old game. I met the servants on their way back from church, and springing a yarn on them about expecting to be called away on business, I soon found how the land lay.

"On Wednesday there would be a clear house, the girls informed me, and would I come in to supper? Would I not! I made myself up with care and an eye to developments on Wednesday, and was round the back of the house promptly at nine, and in the kitchen as soon as the housekeeper cleared out. It was a heavy warm night, black as pitch, with a thunder-storm growing up near at hand, and it suited my purpose to a T.

"The first thing was to get the girls safely stowed away where they couldn't interfere, and I thought I should have to risk a bit to manage that. But bless you, I didn't! The little fools fell into my trap beautifully, and went giggling down to the cellar together after a jug of ale at the mere suggestion on my part that I was

dry and could do with a liquor. I went with them to hold the candle, and I noticed with satisfaction that the cellar was a fine, safe, concrete square under the back part of the house, ventilated by a small grating only, and having access from the scullery. I took care to get them well inside, with myself between them and the door, and talking a lot of nonsense, I have no doubt, but keeping them unsuspecting to the end.

“‘What’s that?’ said I, suddenly pointing to the farthest corner of the cellar.

“The girls turned their backs to me for a second to look, and I dropped the candle and was outside with the door closed and fastened before they knew I had left.

“I didn’t stop to explain things, as you may think, but got back to the kitchen again, taking the precaution to bolt the door on the top of the cellar steps as I came through.

“I went over the rooms at my ease, and was pretty well paid for my trouble. Of course, I only took valuable stuff; but the lady owned one or two good bits of jewellery which she didn’t seem to have much heed for, seeing that she had left them lying about at home instead of wearing them. Gold and stones alone I reckoned would melt up into a cool thousand—fifteen hundred, if I had any luck—and, besides, I had snapped thirty-five quid in hard cash, and nigh on a hundred and fifty in notes.

“It was better than I had expected, and I tell you I

was gloating by the time I had finished with the upstairs rooms.

"‘Now,’ thinks I to myself, ‘I’ll just look over the dining-room and the old buck’s study, and skip. I’ll catch the ten-ten nicely, and be in London a good bit before those girls are out of the cellar.’

"I came singing jauntily downstairs, and then I got a nasty shock which made my heart thump a bit, I can tell you. The hall door was standing open, and right there on the mat, with his lantern turned on, stood a policeman. As I said, I was dressed up pretty dickey, which was a fortunate thing for me. With my careless sort of unconcern and that rig I had a chance still, but it was a slim one.

"‘What are you doing here?’ said the man, coming forward to open the entertainment and tripping over a tandem bike that was standing in the hall.

"‘What the dickens *do* you suppose I’m doing?’ I retorted. ‘Mind that machine. That’s the worst of you fellows, you are all so clumsy about the feet. What are *you* doing in my uncle’s house, if it’s not a rude question? Got a match? Just light that gas, will you. Those wretched girls have gone off somewhere, and left the place to run itself. That’s the style, thanks,’ said I, keeping cool and chattering away to save time. My hat and coat were in the kitchen, and I wanted them badly. I wouldn’t have minded going without them as a matter of fact, but it wouldn’t have been wise. Running my eye round, I caught sight of a light dust-

coat affair, hanging on a peg in the hall, and I reached it down as soon as I saw it.

“‘Sorry I can’t stop,’ said I. ‘I’ve got an appointment.’

“‘There isn’t a train for nearly an hour yet,’ said the policeman drily.

“‘Oh, I don’t want a train this time,’ said I desperately. ‘I’m going by bike. Where’s that confounded cap of mine got to? Oh! here it is.’



“The policeman stood there stolidly eyeing me.”—*p.* 50.

“I laid hands on a deer-stalker, and tilting it on my head, coolly reached for my cigar case, and extracting one, bit off the end and lit up. ‘Now, if you’ve no objection, I’ll be off,’ said I, laying hands on the tandem and pushing it back to the door.

“The policeman stood there stolidly eyeing me,

though I could see that he was in a very jumpy, uncertain state.

"‘Did Mr. Waller expect you?’ he queried.

"‘Well, seeing that I’m stopping here for a fortnight, I imagine he did,’ said I, wondering who the dickens Mr. Waller might be.

"‘Why, it’s rather odd he didn’t mention it, then,’ he retorted suspiciously. ‘He came into the station to-night and asked to have a man especially told off to watch the place.’

"‘Oh! the old fool is too confoundedly fussy about his six-three wigwam. It’s a craze with him, you know,’ said I. ‘I got down after he’d left. He expected me last night, but I was kept in town.’

"‘Well, that may be all right, sir,’ said old splash-foot, a trifle more civil now, ‘but I must report this at the station. It’s in the way of duty, and I daresay you won’t mind stepping in with me just to settle the thing as far as I am concerned.’

"‘Not in the least,’ said I. I did mind very much, but I couldn’t very well say so. ‘I’m going past as a matter of fact, but I sha’n’t have time to come back for the machine.’

"‘Take it along, sir,’ he suggested, and I cursed him for his pains. Anyway, there was no help for it, so I just made a pretence of looking round to see that everything was straight and then got the tandem outside, hoping to have a chance of getting him to hold it on some pretext or other, and then doing a scoot

while he was so occupied. I was pretty good at a sprint, and it was a level chance that if I got on the off side of him I could gain enough lead to get clear yet. I did too ; but not quite in the way I had anticipated.

"We had got a hundred yards from the house when I wanted to turn up my trouser legs, and saddled him with the bike while I did it. He had been casting a furtive eye on the machine the while I was wheeling it, and then he remarked casually :

"‘I can ride, sir. If you’d like to wheel down it will perhaps save time for you.’

"‘The dickens you can,’ thought I, for I suddenly remembered that I didn’t know anything of tandems, and if that leaked out after my statement it would look fishy, to say the least of it ; but it doesn’t do to give in, and I’ve often found that a game can be saved just when it seems hopelessly lost.

"‘I’m smoking,’ said I casually, ‘but it *will* save a bit of time. If you can steer, nip up, but don’t upset the bally thing. I don’t want to turn up in rags and bruises, to say nothing of the value of the jigger.’

"I believe the man had been positively aching to get a spin. Anyway, he needed no second bidding, but was in the seat by the time I had finished talking. I managed to perch myself on the saddle behind him, and I suppose I wasn’t abnormally clumsy, as he didn’t have any suspicion of my ability.

"My ‘uncle’s’ house was a mile and a half good from the little town, on the outskirts of which the

station was situated, and before we had got over the half-mile I was beginning to see that there wasn't the least necessity for going that way at all. I didn't see it quite so clearly until, chancing to drop my hand into the pocket of the coat I had annexed, my fingers closed round the butt of a revolver—a pretty little nickel-plated affair, which looks so innocent and is so remarkably deadly.

"‘By the way, policeman,’ said I, extracting it and noting with joy that some at least of the chambers were loaded. ‘Where does that road off to the right lead?’

"‘There ain't any road off to the right,’ said he, pedalling away with a decision that showed, whatever else he was slack in, he knew a good bit about controlling a bicycle.

"‘Right coming out, I mean,’ I explained.

"‘Oh that goes away to Tilbury and Southend,’ said he. ‘It's a dreary stretch, too. There ain't a place in it until you get nearly into Grays.’

"‘Good,’ said I, chuckling to myself. ‘Well, look here, policeman! My friend is waiting for me in that direction, and I am afraid, after all, I sha'n't have time to come with you. Instead, I'll let you come with me. Don't stop or yell. This chilly ring at your neck is the muzzle of my small persuader, and if you startle me it might go off, in which case you'd get hurt.’

"‘I thought as much,’ I heard him mutter under his breath, and I pressed the muzzle up a bit closer just to

emphasise the fact that I had got the upper hand for the time being, and was minded to use it.

"Just then the grey outline of a finger-post took my attention, and with grim amusement I urged him to take the turn carefully, and in another minute we were speeding into the black wilds of desolate country roads, and was safe for the time, anyway.

"Bobby-Splayfoot up in front didn't seem at all



"'I thought as much,' I heard him mutter."—*p*, 53.

pleased with his graft. I was a rank duffer, of course, and rather a heavy weight, and not good for very much even had I been minded to do my share, which I wasn't. It pleased me to hear him puffing away with a wicked word or so in between to flavour his pants. Besides that, I wasn't at all sure what the effect would be if I actively interfered, so I just followed the pedals

round and spent my time in planning out the next act.

"It was all right enough for an escape ; but I couldn't go riding over the country behind that slop for the rest of the night, that was certain, and if we ran into anything like a big town I knew my position would be risky to say the least of it. To stop or get off was equally ticklish. My capture was of the fighting breed, and it was only when I had got him perched helpless in front of me with my revolver against his collar that I felt quite sure of him. What's more, I hadn't the ghost of an idea where I was, and to get dropped into an unknown country under such conditions is a long way towards getting nabbed.

"I was a bit anxious, though it was funny on the whole, and the way we broke the law makes me chuckle to think of even now. We were riding lampless for one thing, and a slop actually did order us to stop at a little village we were running through, down by the river towards Grays.

"‘Don't take any notice,’ said I significantly, and we rode straight past the man, who must have wondered to see a colleague thus engaged, and recklessly breaking rules he was paid to make others observe.

"We were going at a pretty fair lick, and these things passed quicker than I could tell you of them, and in between I had to do a lot of rapid compressed thinking. It would never do to run into Grays, and I knew that I had outside that the choice of the London

and Southend roads. I chose the former, and headed my motor on to the first decent road we struck bearing off to the right. Sheer good luck helped me along a bit further, for this road was as quiet and deserted as the one we had left, and as good. It was a fine machine we were on, and I got quite a taste for biking in that little experience—with someone else to do the grind. I told the slop he should have it as a keepsake when we had done, but he only grunted. He was sweating like a bull, and beginning to feel the fag I expect, or perhaps, he was not a cheerful-minded chap. I tried him lots of ways, but he would'n't respond, so after making him turn his lamp on to serve in place of one on our jigger I let him alone.

"We had been riding for close on three hours, I judge, and must be getting well in. It was too late for anyone to be about, but villages and then towns got more and more frequent, and then we ran down under a railway, and came slap into the middle of Romford. There was a policeman talking to a sergeant in the middle of the road there, and I pitched them a 'good-night' and touched my chap's neck with the cold barrel of my revolver. Our light prevented them from noting anything unusual about us, and we were by and running out into open country again almost as soon as their response was heard.

"'What place was that?' I asked by way of a feeler.

"'Don't know,' was grunted in response.

"‘And not feeling interested, don’t care a hang,’ I added cheerfully. ‘Arn’t you tired?’

"The chap was tired—tired and sick, and he didn’t mind telling me so in forcible terms. He also added a suggestion that I should find it all added to the bill when he got a chance of sending it in.

"‘Rats,’ said I. ‘It’ll do you no end of good. You are doing a little bit of hard, straightforward, wholesome work for a change—so much better than loafing about street corners with a lantern, or hanging on to a slavey for a bit of cold pie. Besides, you like cycling.’

"‘Oh, it ain’t the riding I object to so much,’ he retorted; ‘it’s the company.’

"‘That’s a change, too,’ said I.

"I was feeling pretty well then, for I had a very good idea of the country, and on ahead there was a fine big hill which offered a very good show for getting clear of the policeman and the bike together, and leaving me free to make a clean bolt.

"We had a couple of rather stiff rises first, which about took all the rest of the steam out of my man, and another five minutes brought us to the top of a nasty drop half a mile long, and with a wicked curve in it. I reached back and found the step and shifted my weight from the saddle on to it, and then when the tandem began to feel the hill I stepped off on a grass bank and stood and watched it go tearing off at an awful scorch.

"‘He’ll come a mucker if he isn’t careful,’ said I to

myself, and I wouldn't have staked much on his chances of getting to the bottom safely.

"The roads met and crossed each other just above where I stepped down, in a very bewildering way for the chap should he get a chance of trying back and hunting for me; but I didn't take any of them. I wanted to get ahead of him on the same road because that was the one place the chap wouldn't expect to find me, and I just nipped over the hedge and kept along down the hill.

"It was just as I had hoped! Not knowing the road, and the machine getting out of hand, the whole bag of tricks had run away with my poor old slop and pitched him into the ditch at the turn. He was sitting up in it saying things when I came level with him, and I left him there to camp out on the spot or ride the tandem home again as he pleased.

"When I got to the bottom, I took to the road again, and dodging Woodford, got across into the forest and landed at Tottenham, tired enough, but very well satisfied with my outing."

CHAP IV.

A QUESTION OF COURAGE.

"**I**F my hair is white," began Mr. Tutt, reminiscently, "it ain't with fright, and it didn't grow that way in a single night, like the chilly prisoner chap's that poet wrote of. All the same, I've had times off and on when any man whose nerve wasn't cast steel would have given in, and made things pleasant and easy for the boys in blue what are paid handsome and regular to take us how they can get us.

"There was one affair up Harrow way I mind in particular which was crowded with danger and desperate situations. I went in it for a sackful of silver, and I came out with no boots, no coat, no hat, and nothing to compensate for the loss of these and time and trouble, and mental and intellectual damages, except a broad streak through my hair where a bullet shaved it down for me, and darn near put me out altogether? And what do you think floored me?"

"The police," I suggested, naturally.

"Not much," retorted Mr. Tutt, with a grin, as

though some pleasant recollection involving the discomfiture of his natural enemies stirred in his mind. 'No; it was a girl of about twenty with a toy pistol what did me fair and square, and gave me one of the worst nights I have ever spent in pursuit of other people's fixings.'

"Fill your pipe, and tell me about it. It sounds interesting, not to say romantic," said I, pushing my pouch over to him.

Nothing loth, Mr. Tutt accepted the tobacco and the suggestion, and then and there proceeded to enlighten me on one of the aspects of burglary as a profession, which certainly tended to prove that it was a question of courage as well as of morals, and, as such, a step beyond the operations of the swindling company promoter or the forger of notes and documents.

"I was hard up," began Mr. Tutt, "and therefore I was not inclined to be captious or as careful as I usually made a point of being. I spotted the house one day when I was looking round for business, and something about its situation and solid style of good, old-fashioned comfort suggested to me that it would pay expenses for me anyhow, and perhaps leave me a bit to go on with.

"It was suburban, and therefore it had the usual conditions to be considered, which don't require any special study. They are all a matter of routine, and we know them before we begin—policeman on the

beat, visiting inspector, and so on. One of three tall, square places it was, with a basement and a sort of cage railing affair in front, with a gate to it, which was used by tradespeople and servants in place of the usual side or back entrance. Of course, that gate was locked, and, as I couldn't get through to the back, and didn't care to chance working on the front door, I saw at once that my only way in was from below.

"Steps led up to the front entrance, and at the base of them was one of those round iron rings where coals are dropped through. It wasn't fastened, and it wasn't long before I managed to lever it up and drop through into the cellar below. I could calculate the depth pretty well, and it had been my purpose to hang on while I pulled the cover fairly over, and then from the ground work it back into place, for it never does to leave things like that behind unless you want to be interrupted at an inconvenient time, just when you have done all the work and are about to help yourself to your wages.

"That was what I intended, but just as I dropped through the hole, which was a pretty tight fit, though I was a thin chap in those days, I heard someone coming along the pavement with boots that are only made by contract for a special class of men I was not fond of.

"I let go and waited, a bit shaky and anxious, on the piles of coals, and the next minute a light flashed

through and showed me the nature of the place I was in, as well as other things.

"Just then my location didn't interest me. I had too much else to think of. The enemy was above, and he was on my trail.

"'What ho,' I heard him murmur, 'this looks like a case. Come out of it, you down there; the game's up.'

"I didn't come out of it, but flattened myself against the coal pile and tried to look like Wall-send at thirty shillings a ton. A big, broad face obscured the opening next. I would have liked to shy a nobby chunk of coal at it, and I could have done it easy, but it wasn't a good time for that sort of exercise, and it never is safe or wise, I can tell you that, mister. You can sell 'em or trick 'em or cheat 'em, but don't ever assault the police. They have got the strong hand all the time, and you turn a chap who's only doing his duty (what he don't care much about) into one with a personal grievance, and then it's bad for your chances of getting free, and worse for you if you get taken."

I promised that I would remember this valuable hint for any future occasion, and Mr. Tutt proceeded.

"Of course, the chap couldn't see me. There wasn't room in that hole for much of him at once. When he put his face there he couldn't get a light, and when he put the light there he couldn't get down to see.

"He tried some more gentle persuasion, but I kept mum, and at last I heard him mutter, 'Gone inside, I shouldn't wonder. This is my show, anyhow, and I reckon you're in for a good thing this time if you play it right, Boffin, my boy.'

"There was a brief interval, and then a couple of plates of leather descended slowly, followed by a length of leg. He was coming down after me. That made me sit up in a hurry, and as the noise of the coal slipping away as I moved stimulated him to greater exertion, it was the most fortunate thing for me that could have happened. If he had been given time to consider he would certainly have seen that he was too fat to come through that hole, and have got out again and tried some other way.

"As it was, he was down and wedged before he knew what had happened, and it was only when I heard him puffing and cussing, and saw his legs start to kick round frantically, that I understood.

"I got one bash in the jaw, which loosened a couple of teeth, before I grabbed hold of his legs. When I did I hung on 'em with all my might, and wedged him in a good two inches, so that I reckoned nothing short of a blacksmith or a crane would get him out again.

"It was as good as a play, but I couldn't stop to enjoy it properly. The noisy end of the circus was still outside, and it wouldn't be long before his yells fetched someone to his assistance. I was out of that

cellar and up the steps and over the railings in a jiffy. That chap looked an awful fool sticking out of a hole in the pavement that way, and I had to chip him a bit, though I did it kindly.



"It made a nice cover with a bit of squeezing."—*p.* 65.

"‘You are in luck, Boffin, my boy,’ said I, ‘and you are playing the game a treat.’

"All the same I shut his mouth with his own handkerchief, and I used mine to fasten his hands behind

him, so that he couldn't do a thing to help himself or call others to help him:

"There was one of those big iron buckets what dust is collected in standing down in the area, and I went back after it. It made a nice cover with a bit of squeezing, and I took his helmet and tunic, which had rubbed up round him like a fringe, put it over him in case the poor chap took cold. Then I dressed myself up and went and knocked at the door.

"An oldish chap, who was all of a shake, opened it, and I skipped inside and shut it carefully behind me as soon as he did.

"‘Sh! not a word,’ said I. ‘There’s an attempt being made to break into your house. They are getting through the coal slip. Come along and we’ll nab them fine!’

"I kept him on the rush, and hustled him through the house just on purpose to prevent him considering things and asking awkward questions. It was a good job he was one of the cowardly kind, or I should have been fixed as it was.

"‘Quietly,’ said I, and we were quiet except for the chattering of his teeth as we descended to the basement and stole out to the cellar.

"I opened the door, and, taking the candle from the other chap’s hand, I illuminated the legs that hung from the roof.

"‘There is one,’ I whispered. ‘Looks as though he

has got wedged, too. Cling hold of him while I go up and secure the other.'

"There wasn't much enthusiasm, but he didn't like to show a want of pluck, and I shoved him forward



"I illuminated the legs that hung from the roof."—*p.* 65.

before he could consider the matter, so that he had to hang on to the legs, which commenced to thrash about again, to save getting a boot in his face.

"'Sha'n't be a jiff!' said I, encouragingly. 'Grip

hold like a bulldog, and don't let him go on any account. Quite likely he's armed !'

" 'Don't be long,' he stammered, as I dodged out of the cellar, taking the light with me and the precaution to close the door and wedge it with a jemmy in case of accidents. Short of them I had a good hour and an open house entirely at my mercy, and I reckoned that I was in for a good and safe bit of biz.

"I didn't trouble much about the lower rooms. Silver was good enough when I had to take chances, but it's heavy, awkward, dangerous stuff to handle, and not worth what you can get in your coat pockets when you have time and a chance to make a critical selection. So I went straight up to the old chap's bedroom, and found that I hadn't gone far wrong in my reckoning. The missus was away evidently, if there was one, and I calculated that I should find all I wanted without any squealing woman waking up and disturbing me.

"I got a fairish bit—not as much as I expected, but still a fair haul, considering it was hard cash and jewels—and if I had only been contented with that lot I would have done better than I did, and saved myself a considerable deal of fright. But knowing that the man of the place was safe enough, and feeling easy and confident-like, I made up my mind to have a look at the other rooms. The first I tried was locked, so I let it be and moved across the landing

and entered another. The door opened easily enough, and I had got half-way across the room and was about to strike a light when a bright gleam shot in my face and blinded me for the moment.

“‘Don’t move any further or I will fire it off,’ said a voice as pretty and rippling as a brook, and I knew it was a girl, and cussed.

“I don’t like firearms! I carried one for moral support, but I never had anything in it, and, anyway, I couldn’t have shot at a woman if I had.

“By-and-by, when my eyes got a bit accustomed to the light, I could make this one out. She was as pretty as a picture, sitting up in bed with a lot of yellow hair all tumbling over her shoulders, and blue eyes and a red and white sort of face that made you think of angels without their wings.

“She nearly winged me, though,” continued Mr. Tutt, with a touch of grim humour. “I could see her hand shaking, and the little toy affair she was pointing at me was going round and round in circles. Move or not, I reckoned if I waited there another second it would go off, and likely as not hit me somewhere. So down I flopped to the floor, and at the same moment there was a sharp crack, and I felt as though a hot iron had been laid on my head.

“‘Oh, dear,’ shrieked the girl; ‘it’s gone off. I do hope I haven’t killed him.’

“That sounded hopeful. She was evidently kind-hearted, and I reckoned that I could play on her

after all, and get away even, if I got no more pickings.

“‘Not quite, miss,’ said I, soothingly. ‘But it’s very dangerous playing with these things. They go off with hardly a touch at times, and before you know it you have a precious human life on your conscience.’

“‘Oh, as to that, I think my conscience would support you,’ said she, spitefully, and it began to dawn on me, owing to something in her tones, that I hadn’t got quite such an easy way out as I had calculated on getting. ‘In the first place, what are you doing in my room—in the house at all?’

“‘I heard a noise and came to see all was right, miss,’ said I. ‘You—er—may not have noticed that I am in the force?’

“‘Rather wearing, isn’t it?’ said she.

“‘Wearing—er—why, miss?’ I asked.

“‘Oh, you seem to have fallen away rather since you were measured for your uniform,’ she retorted acidly, and I knew from the scornful way that she indicated Boffin’s tunic that it was a waste of time to tell any more lies along that direction.

“She still kept the revolver pointed more or less in my direction, and by the fact that it didn’t wobble nearly so badly now I guessed that her nerve was steadying. When it got to the point of allowing her to try and take aim I judged it would be a safe opening for a bolt.

"I think I must have betrayed the nature of my thoughts, for the girl smiled disdainfully.

"'Oh, no, you won't,' said she. 'Put your hands up over your head, and walk backwards until I tell you to stop.'

"I walked. It was pretty foolish, and I was wasting a lot of valuable time; but sometimes the only possible thing to do is what you are told, never mind who tells you, and this seemed to be one of them.

"'That will do,' she commanded, when I had taken about a dozen paces. 'There's a chair behind you. Sit down.'

"I sat.

"'Now,' she continued, 'I will tell you what you are and why you are here. You are not a thief, nor a policeman for that matter; but I'm going to pretend that you are. The letters you were sent after are with my solicitor, so you wouldn't have got them in any case. You can tell your employer that when you see him. How much has he offered you to do this for him?'

"So that was the explanation, was it! I tumbled at once, and understood what had been puzzling me from the first—why she didn't hold me up, and run me straight in to her father. At first I thought it was delicacy about the situation; but it was just female temper. She had got letters of some sort in her possession which she expected to have stolen, and she jumped to the conclusion that I had been put on for that purpose.

"At first I thought of pretending that I had ; but on turning the matter over I couldn't see any profit in it, and considerable danger. It might be some love affair in which the man had let himself in for damages and no end of animosity, and just then I could tell by her manner I should stand a heap better chance as a mere common burglar than an agent paid to obtain the key to her revenge.

"'Well, miss, it ain't a nice thing to tell a lady ; but, as a matter of fact, I'm here entirely on my own,' said I, trying to look sad and solemn. 'You wouldn't care to hear all my story ; but I'm hungry and cold and tired, and I came in here for shelter, and to get something to eat.'

"'We don't keep eatables in our bedroom,' said she shortly. 'You mean you are a thief, I suppose?'

"'That's about it, miss,' said I humbly.

"'Why don't you work for your living?' she demanded.

"'Well, I did try, miss,' said I, surprised into truth by the unexpectedness of the query. 'But the pay was too small, and I don't like it.'

"'I suppose not,' said she drily. 'Well, I can't help you. Moreover, I don't believe you. I am going to dress, and take you in to my father. You haven't done anything to him?'

"Her voice quavered with a sudden anxiety as the idea struck her.

“‘No, miss,’ I hastened to assure her. ‘The last I saw of the old gent. he seemed quite well.’

“‘Oh, then, you have been to his room!’ she exclaimed. ‘Pick up your chair from the back, and turn it towards the wall. I’m going to get up, and if you move your head I’ll shoot you in the back.’

“I did as I was told promptly, and sat facing a green-striped paper, while from the switching and rustling I gathered that the girl was carrying out her part of the programme.

“‘Take off your coat, and throw it behind you,’ was the next order. ‘You have got a pistol, I am sure, and, anyhow, you’ll be easier to manage that way.’

“I worried myself out of the policeman’s tunic, and let that fall, hoping to content her; but it didn’t.

“‘Now your own coat,’ she directed. ‘I can see you have something in your pockets. Turn round first, then I can see that you are not up to anything.’

“I turned obediently, and an idea came to me. The girl, wonderfully pretty and nice she looked too, was standing right behind me, and when I turned and faced her I saw my way clear in a second. I just slipped off my coat, and held it towards her, careless like, with both hands.

“She stepped forward, taken off her guard, and the next minute I had rolled her up in it. She gave a shriek as the pistol went off, and at first I was afraid she had shot herself, but she hadn’t.

“‘Be quiet, miss,’ said I, firmly. ‘I won’t hurt you. I’m sorry to have to do this ; but I can’t go to prison just to be polite to a lady. I’m off straight out of the house now at once.’

“I pushed her away from me, stooped and grabbed up her pistol, and bolted for the door. But as soon as I got it open I found that I hadn’t done with that night’s fun by a long way. The house was full of smoke that was pouring up the staircase, and a dull, flickering light below told me that that was already alight.

“Quite likely I had done it myself. I had lit a few matches finding my way about downstairs before I came up, and one of them might have fallen on to something, and set light to the place.

“I tried to make my way to the stairs, but it was hopeless. I was well-nigh choked before I had gone a yard, and it was as much as I could do to grope my way back to the girl’s room.

“The door was open, and she was standing in it wringing her hands, and looking a very pretty picture of fright, only I hadn’t got no time for admiring pictures.

“‘Save me ! oh, do save me !’ she screamed, as I came out of the smoke towards her.

“I pushed her back into the room, and shut the door.

“I heard the engine come tearing up as I did it ; but we were at the back of the house, and the chances

were that we should be dead and cremated before they got to us.

"I looked at the girl, and felt really bad about it. It wasn't a very nice way of going out, but it would be easy enough, and I didn't much concern myself whether I got put out of it or not. But that girl was different, and I thought, if for no other reason, that as I had got her into the mess I ought to get her out if possible.

"So great was her terror that she hardly seemed to recognise me as the burglar she had very nearly trapped. I was afraid she would faint or something like that, and if she did bang would go her last chance, if not mine. I did what I could to soothe her, and promised to get her out all right, and she stopped screaming, which was something.

"There was about thirty feet between the window and the ground; but there was a broad, flat roof barely five above it, and when I saw that I knew that there was a sporting chance of getting out, if not free.

"‘Now, miss,’ said I firmly, ‘you’ve got to be plucky, and do just what I tell you. Your father is safe enough, and so will you be if you will keep your head and rely on me.’

"She kept staring at me with eyes wide open and her face deathly white. Whether she understood or not I couldn't decide, but she nodded her head as though she meant that she did. There was no time

to fool away, for already the room was half-filled with smoke that drifted under the door, and I could already hear the fierce roar and crackle of the flames on the staircase and landing outside.

"I hauled away a dressing-table affair, flung the window wide open, and, dragging the girl close up to it, I climbed out on the sill. That sort of thing is not very difficult when you have had a good experience of dodging coppers over roofs like I had, and a minute after I had pulled myself up on to the roof above, and was reaching down towards the girl. She shuddered, and drew away at first, but I urged her of the necessity, and by coaxing and dragging at last got her outside, and standing on the sill with her hands gripping the parapet above. She was half-dead with fright and perfectly still, which was fortunate. If she had kicked about I couldn't have done it. As



"It was a big effort to haul her up to me."—*p.* 76.

it was, it was a big effort to catch her under both arms, and haul her up to me.

"Once there and the worst of the danger past, she recovered herself a bit, and allowed me to lead her over the roof on to that of the next house.

"There was a huge crowd and half-a-dozen engines round the burning building, I could see in one hasty glance, and then I drew the girl back in case we should be spotted. She had nothing more to fear; but I had a good deal, and some of this I explained to her.

"‘You saved my life,’ she exclaimed, extending her hand, but with considerable dignity. ‘I don’t care what you are or anything about it. You sha’n’t be prosecuted, and my father will reward, not punish, you.’

"I shook my head, though I was pleased somehow as I took the hand she offered. Her father mightn’t, but the police wouldn’t be as kind, especially the blue-bottle I had tinned up so neatly down below. She urged, but I wouldn’t take any chances. Better no sentence than one with mitigating circumstances attached, I considered, and so with chunks of mortar and brick fragments I drew the attention of the fire-escape people in our direction, and about the time the girl was swung off into safety I had dropped down into the empty house below, and made my way into the street, and home with nothing to show for my night’s work but a singed head and scarred hands

to set against the loss of my boots and coat with one hundred of pounds' worth of stuff in the pockets. And yet somehow I was a bit pleased and fairly satisfied with my night's work."

CHAP. V.

RAISING THE WIND.

“WELL, what,” said I insinuatingly, “was the very last job you did? Of course I know it was a very long while ago, and that you never dream of treading the broad and crooked way in your present stage of grace and enlightenment. But there must have been a dividing line, a sort of thinning off towards the edge; and there was, of course, ‘a positively the last appearance’ ere W. Tutt, the burglar, became his present honest, upright, sober self.”

Mr. Tutt laughed grimly at my subtle flattery, and the somewhat ambiguous nature of its terms, to which I was driven by the choice I had to make between being offensive or being truthful.

Mind you, I believe the man was a colossal old fraud, who would turn back to rascality, if he had ever quitted it, at the beckoning of a watch-chain or the flash of a brooch. But it suited his purpose to refer to the pages of his exceedingly dun-coloured

past as being finally turned over and done with, and it suited me to fall in with his humour and accept him as a strayed sheep with an interesting past returned to the fold, rather than a giddy mutton still frolicking round in forbidden pastures, with a jemmy rampant in one hand and a dark lantern couchant in the other. I give Mr. Tutt's story in his own words:—

“My last ‘experience ’ was a casual bit of hay-making done on a cross-country road that ran near the border between Herts and Cambridgeshire. I was stopping down there for the benefit of my health, we will say, the climate of Islington having got a bit sultry and enervating just then. It was a fine stretch of road, about as good a piece as you could wish for, being free of natural obstacles, and not very crowded with places of any importance—just a sleepy little provincial town or two and a few scattered villages. It was greatly favoured with gents who liked to make their motor cars go at something beyond the pace of a respectable donkey barrow.

“I thought I might do a bit there profitable to myself, and tending rather to keep the laws than break them, and so I got hold of an old police helmet and a coat and lantern to match. It was a rough and ready get-up, but I only reckoned to use it at night time, and for that it was quite good enough to pass muster. Besides, a chap who is being pulled up for scorching is not in a mood to be sharply critical. He is weighing the chances of running you down and

getting free that way, or of letting himself out at the cheapest rate by corrupting with silver if that will do, and gold if he must, the guardians of law and order.

"I had very good sport, considered as sport, and it was not long before I began to perceive that, while it lasted, the job I was on was more profitable than crib-cracking. I made a fiver the first time I tried, and the worst night's work in a week when it was wet and rainy and very muddy brought me in a couple of quid.

"I wouldn't have believed before I tried that it would be such an easy thing to raise a living that way. Talk of the days of highwaymen being over. Why! they have only just begun. Anyone with pluck and shrewdness and a little brass can make a handsome living on highways at night if there are not too many policemen about. All he has to do is as I did—show an official helmet and a lantern to anyone coming along a bit lively. They'll bluster and swear, or cry and cringe, but they'll always pay.

"Turning this over in my mind—and I had plenty of time between the acts, so to speak—I came to the conclusion that there was very good and abundant reason for this. In the first place, the bias against motors makes a 'pull' a very serious matter to the pocket as well as combining the very objectionable fact of being summoned, and the inevitable newspaper notoriety. Nobody cares about that. And

then, generally, there are other factors at work which will make a man ready to pay anything within reason rather than risk exposure.

"The only thing you have to be careful of is giving yourself away too easy, and it takes a bit of managing to let your victims see that you can be got at without committing yourself. If you are too stiff and stern they are afraid, because, if you cut up rough, it is a sight worse for them in the long run than the initial offence, which perhaps wasn't an offence at all. If you are too open and candid, you may tumble into a trap yourself, because the authorities have some idea as to how a policeman's screw is padded out and made sleek and comfortable, and for all you can tell, an inspector and his chum may be in the car you are holding up, out not so much for recreation as to make the policeman's life an unhappy one by pulling him up for not stopping speedy cars, or for doing so illegally and with a view to personal gain. That is, of course, if you are a legitimate policeman.

"I didn't mind myself, not having to face the subsequent exposure and official schooling, and I knew enough to get what I wanted without setting down the terms in black and white, or letting it be seen that I was only in the business for profit.

"Yes; it was a lovely game—while it lasted; but the trouble was that it did not last long. Possibly I got a bit reckless, or it may be that the impunity

with which I carried on the thing made it seem trivial and mean, and set me longing for a bolder game. It was a revelation, considered as a study of the meaner side of humanity ; but I wasn't out to study humanity. I was out for the purpose of meeting a long-felt want in the exchequer, and about the time I had supplied this want I fell in with Nat Wilson, who was working a neighbouring race-course, with an eye opened for something of a more retired and profitable nature.

"He was a deep, quiet sort of chap, who did more than ever he got credit for, or time for doing. I had always thought he was safe enough, and when I fell in with him I didn't mind telling him in the way of conversation the lay I was working.

"He didn't take much notice—said it seemed a better plant than the race-course ; and it couldn't very well be a worse one, seeing that that was pretty well played out, what with the competition and the wariness of the public.

"I was glad he seemed indifferent about it, because I was afraid immediately after I had told him that he would want to stand in with me.

"He knew a better game than that, blight him ! and he let me in for as beastly a mess as ever I got into."

Mr. Tutt paused to relieve his feelings here, and I gathered, from the force and fluency of his remarks, that time had not entirely obliterated the recollection

of the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of a gentleman of his own persuasion, whose ethics did not constrain him to exercise that honour among thieves, the possession of which, you know, is their proverbial attribute.

He resumed :

“The next night was a raw, wet, miserable turnout. I had two minds about letting anyone who was fool enough to go out in it in a motor car or on foot pass free of toll as far as I was concerned. If it hadn't been so deadly dull where I was stopping I should have stayed indoors. As it was, I preferred the mild excitement of the road to ‘shove halfpenny’ or the eternal jaw of crops and weather in the bar parlour with a pack of plodding old farmers and country shopkeepers. There was always the chance of an additional fiver besides ; and after waiting till just on nine in a soaking drizzle, I got it—the chance, I mean, not the fiver. I got plenty of other things ; but I did not get that. It came mowing down the road in a handsome, classy turnout, that had not left much change out of five hundred when it was bought.

“I clapped on my helmet and flashed my lantern, and stepped out as it drew up to me.

“Two young fellows were on the car, and pretty foolish they looked in their goggles and leathers when I flashed the light on them.

“‘Very sorry, gents,’ said I, ‘but you are exceeding

the lawful speed. We have strict orders about it, and I'll have to——'

"I saw the chap's hand travelling towards his pocket as I began, and I was wondering whether to strike him for a fiver outright, or to let it go at whatever figure he offered, when another light was played on us, and to my disgust a genuine bobby



"I flashed my lantern and stepped out."—*p.* 83.

stepped out from the bushes behind me, and moved up so as to pin me between him and the car.

"'What's all this?'" said he; and I knew from his tone that the game was up.

"One of the chaps on the car had jumped down by this time, or I would have taken my chance

of bowling him over and making a run for it. Any way, it seemed pretty safe. There was nothing against me except the helmet, and I might put it all down to a lark I was playing on the chaps.

“‘They were going rather fast, and I was just giving them a friendly pointer,’ said I.

“‘You’re not a policeman,’ said he, ignoring my remarks. ‘What’s the game? I reckon you had better come down to the station, and explain it there.’

“I reckoned not, and I was about to emphasize my view, when a further interruption attracted the attention of us all.

“It was a police sergeant this time, and old blue-tunic hauled himself up smartly to the salute.

“‘We shall have the whole bally force round us soon,’ said one of the motor chaps, with a short laugh.

“‘Excessive speed, sir,’ said the policeman, ‘and this chap here stopped them, pretending to be on the force. There have been several complaints lately, sir.’

“‘Anything to say?’ queried the sergeant, ignoring me and turning to the driver of the car.

“‘We’ll see this out, sergeant,’ was the pointed retort.

“‘All right! I’ll come down with you if you will give me a lift,’ said Cheese-cutter; and I thought, though I couldn’t be sure, that I saw him accept

something from the other and transfer it to his pocket.

“‘So that’s the game, is it?’ thought I to myself. ‘You get the cash, the bobby gets the credit, and I get six months.’

“If it hadn’t been for the bobby I believe I’d have got clear. The sergeant didn’t seem to trouble about me at all, and I could have bolted easily if that wretched bluebottle hadn’t shepherded me into the car and taken a seat beside me in the back.

“There was about three miles to run to the station, and we did it sedately. It wasn’t much of a pleasure-trip, as far as I was concerned; but there wasn’t a ghost of a show of getting out of it.

“We drew up opposite the police station in the sleepy, deserted little town of W——. It was raining hard, and scarcely a soul was about.

“‘Best get inside,’ suggested the sergeant, stepping down. ‘Constable, you’ll make the charge, and these gentlemen will give evidence. I don’t think there is anything to support a charge against them of furious driving.’

“There was a world of meaning in the tone, gentle as the suggestion was, and the policeman understood it as well as the rest of us.

“‘What about the car?’ asked one of the motorists.

“‘Oh, I’ll stay by that,’ said the sergeant carelessly. ‘You won’t be detained long, and I daresay you will be glad to get on.’

“‘We shall,’ was the emphatic response ; and the next moment the procession, with myself leading, passed through the narrow doorway.

“The sergeant in charge was minding the baby, or washing up the tea things or something. Anyhow, it was a good ten minutes before he appeared, and one of the motorists, impatiently searching for his watch, made the shocking discovery that it had gone just as he appeared in the doorway of the charge room, hustling himself into his official tunic as he came.

“‘By jove ! Reg, I believe the beggar has pinched my watch,’ observed the man who had made the discovery.

“I, the ‘beggar’ referred to, had certainly not pinched his watch ; but there had been a good deal of pinching done by someone. Not only his watch but his chain and money, had vanished during that three-mile ride, and his companion had been cleared out as effectively and more thoroughly still.

“The biggest joke of all was the discovery that the policeman had suffered in a similar manner, though to a milder tune, losing a silver turnip and three half-crowns—the remains of his week’s screw, as he pathetically put it.

“They charged me with the whole lot in a beastly reckless fashion that set me talking of defamation of character and actions at law.

“‘Why not say the sergeant took it?’ said I

sarcastically, for there is nothing like being accused of what you haven't done to give you pluck.

"‘Sergeant, what sergeant?’ demanded the inspector, sharply.

"‘He is—I didn’t notice—he—I,’ stammered the bobby.

"There was an immediate break for the door, in which I started to join, but the inspector stopped me.

"‘You’ll stay here and rest,’ said he, with a dry sort of smile.

"I smiled, too, to myself, though I was anxious and uneasy at the unexpected turn things had taken. The sergeant had gone, it was found, and so had the motor car—vanished into the night, with not so much as a faint whiff of paraffin left on the damp night air to indicate the trail.

"The gentlemen with, or rather without the motor were furious, as well they might be. They swore at the inspector, at me, at the bobby, at everything and everybody. Watches, chains, rings, purses—fifty pounds odd in cash, and a five hundred pound car spirited away, and not so much as a kick left them in return. And they thought of all these things, and of the simple, silly way they had been done, and they pumped out swears to suit their theme.

"The inspector got the needle badly, and he let me have the benefit of it. For want of anything better, he held me on a charge of impersonating the

police for an illegal purpose, and clapped me into the cells.

"Then Robert got his turn, and what with the inspector ragging him, the other two swearing at him, and the loss of his turnip and three half-crowns, the poor chap was near crying.

"Of course that didn't help me much; but it served to soften the blow, and it was not till I was left to myself, and the men who had once owned a motor had been taken round to the Station Hotel and vouched for by the inspector, in the absence of a groat



"And they pumped out swears to suit their theme.—*p.* 88.

with which to rent a bed for themselves, that I was able to go into the thing.

"It was smart! Smarter than any game I had ever played, and as I thought it all out I jumped to the solution, and swore a bit on my own account. It was Wilson without a doubt. Whether he had planned it out, or whether, as was more likely, he had taken advantage of an opportunity, I couldn't determine; but I was dead sure that it was Wilson, and

I was so cut up about it that if there had been anyone handy I would have given him away.

"It was a dirty trick not to have let me out, even if he had taken the spoil himself, and I made up my mind to get even as soon as the chance came round.

"Calm reflection showed me that it was best not to say anything just then. They might twist it into a 'put-up' affair, and anyway I should have to own up to a shady companion which might set inquiries afloat concerning my own antecedents.

"As it was, I called myself Smithers, and got a month for nothing in particular under that name. They gave it a name, several names, in fact, which left me in doubt as to whether I was convicted of being a policeman and not stopping the car, or of stealing the car and not being a policeman.

"I don't think the magistrate really understood it himself. At first he committed me for trial for the last-named offence, and commended the policeman; then it was explained to him, and he censured the policeman, and commended me. After a third laborious, detailed, annotated epitome of the night's work, he blamed us all, and sent me away for a month, with hard labour.

"Wilson worked the thing down to the last half-penny. He found out the address of the car-owner from some letter in his pocket-book, drove straight there, and looted the place of all the small portable

stuff he could shift. It was shut up, except for a caretaker, while the family were seasiding, and the caretaker admitted him on the strength of the car. He abandoned this in a Newmarket hotel, and got back to London by train. The week after he was pulled for a burglary at Notting Hill, and is now doing concentrated penance—four years come October—for his misdeeds.

“And if I hadn’t cut away from those wicked days and turned over an entirely new leaf, I would explain a few things concerning him to the N—— police that would interest a lot of folks, including a member of the force who still laments a silver turnip and three half-crowns, and those who on that memorable night took the most expensive bit of motoring, I should say, that has ever been indulged in, costly as the sport is.”

CHAP. VI.

A SAFE TRANSACTION.

"IT isn't the dangers or the difficulties of the trade we fear," said Mr. Tutt thoughtfully. "They are part of the game, and are taken into consideration beforehand; but the unforeseen contingencies are a quantity which the burglar of experience dreads even more than the amateur. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'—you know the quotation, I expect; and it applies, even though it takes a pretty big and elastic imagination to construe us into angels. The amateur fears only the obvious; we dread the tricks of fortune."

"But surely," said I, "the stakes are set out plainly enough. It is a straightforward proposition—a few hundred pounds, more or less, in portable property, against your liberty for months or years, more or less, according to the size of the job and your methods of procedure."

"It may seem that way," acknowledged Mr. Tutt, with a superior smile; "but there is more than that

in the game. What, for instance, do you say to doing burglary as a means of supplementing your income with absolute impunity, and then doing time for nothing at all?"

"That sounds interesting, though obscure," said I. "Fill your glass, and let's have the details."

No ways loath, the genial old rascal whom I had bribed by odd bits of casual charity to enlighten me concerning the gentle art of burglary, mixed himself Scotch and lemon, and sugar and hot water in due and just proportions, sat comfortably back in the chair, crossed his legs, and delved in the storehouse of his mind after odd chunks of experience from the mis-spent years which had brought him all the way from respectability and the proud position of lawyer's clerk into the gutter.

"As you know already," he commenced, "I began life in a lawyer's office, and while there I learnt the way and acquired the need of providing myself with other and more lucrative sources of income."

"Did a little burglary in your spare time so as to be able to study the law on the subject with inside knowledge, and bring sympathy as well as understanding to bear when you had to help the unfortunate breakers of safes and despoilers of suburban homes?" I suggested.

"Exactly," quoth Mr. Tutt with a grin, "and I managed very nicely, too, thanks to my legal knowledge and natural sagacity, and a fair share of tact.

All would have been well if Fate hadn't brought me into contact with a cleverer scamp than myself. And the confounded part of the whole affair was that, while there were dozens of cases where I might have been fairly laid by the heels, I came a cropper over a two-penny little scrap-iron swindle in which I was the victim, and entitled to sympathy rather than the four years of penal servitude which I got.

"You see, it was this way! One of our clients was a commission agent in a very large way of business who dealt in devious pathways, which made us a necessary item in his expenditure, both in ordinary pecuniary transactions, and in legal advice to safeguard him from treading over the line which divides respectability and a tall hat from squalor and a dark lantern.

"Quite what was meant by 'commission agent' I never discovered; but from time to time we handed over huge sums of money to him, and this fact suggested to me that I, also being a commission agent, might do a bit of profitable business in this direction. He had a set of offices in a block of buildings east of the Mansion House, and as I had to go there on business pretty frequently, it was the easiest thing in the world to burgle them.

"There were only two difficulties. The first was to know just when it would be worth while; the other to do it safely.

"Our dealings with him gave me a pretty safe guide towards overcoming the first. When we handed over

the next large amount to him would serve; but the safe in which it would be found was in the front office, and that, I discovered, was a room uncurtained and lit at night, so that people going by in cabs and 'buses, and even walking on the opposite side of the way, could see everything that went on in the room—or off.

"Light, that is *the* safeguard against burglars. Better than all your steel shutters and massive safes. A night light is a burglar's horror, and a shop with no shutters up and a light burning is something that no one in my profession will tackle on any consideration. Detection is certain, and escape well-nigh impossible."

"Let thy light so shine before men that they will respect thy safe and flee thy cash box," said I. "I see! It is worth attention, and when I get anything together worth burgling I will remember and save the expenses of a Chubb outfit."

"To make matters worse," continued Mr. Tutt patiently, "the safe, a huge green-painted steel chamber, directly faced the window. It couldn't be opened without observation, and to force it was absolutely impossible in the face of the public, and right under the noses of the policemen in uniform and out.

"I did a lot of thinking, but it took me nearly a month to solve the problem, and then I got a hint from a little third-rate provincial theatre where a drama of the approved Adelphi type was being enacted.

"I went to see it while waiting for the witching hour of midnight to serve me for a flying visit I contemplated to a residence on the outskirts. I had come down for that purpose; but the flash that illuminated me so completely filled my mind, that I would have relinquished my original purpose had it not been for the fare and time I was out.

"I did the 'job,' but without enthusiasm, and the twenty pounds odd that I netted seemed trivial and of no account against the affair that was pressing on my mind. It was a timely inspiration too, for all that month money had been rolling in to us in trust for the commission fraud, and we had got all our staff at work pulling levers and manipulating springs in a legal sense to round up business enterprises and press payments from reluctant debtors and struggling or recalcitrant firms.

"Quite why there was so much energy all of a sudden was known only to the principal himself and our chief. To a business man it would have suggested an intention to try another climate and a change of scene.

"I got an impression of the locks which stood between the main corridor and the room in which the safe stood, and fitted myself out with keys to match. There were only three required, and to one who understands the art, a file and a few blanks make short work of difficulties of that sort.

"My masterpiece required more thought and labour.

From the roof of a passing 'bus I snapshotted the safe one afternoon when the sun shone most conveniently and threw a light right upon it.

"Then, with the resulting print and a careful observation of size and colouring, I set to work. My other appliances were simple—an oblong bamboo frame made to fit together at need, with a couple of spikes in the lower transverse bar to make it stand, then a roll of canvas deftly marked and painted up; and, upon my word, the thing was so natural that I could have gone and burgled it myself in a dim light. You catch on?"

"Yes, I think so," said I. "It was a dummy front, behind which you could work at you leisure. I always have maintained that those sensational dramas are immoral. They are too well conceived, and lend an unnecessary aid to the enterprising but unimaginative backslider."

"Well, that depends on how you look at it," grunted Mr. Tutt with a sour grin. "Anyway, it *was* a dummy, and a speaking likeness of the real thing.

"I didn't waste any time. There was, to my certain knowledge, close on five thousand pounds in hard cash that should be in the possession of that commission agent, and where more likely than in that safe?"

"I took the last seven hundred round myself early in the afternoon, and that evening I did the trick that I had prepared so elaborately; that is to say, I got in the building, made my way along the dimly-

lit corridors, and entered the office of my unconscious benefactor. I had my collapsible safe with me, of course, and one or two useful little tools with which I could guarantee to see the inside of anything in the safe maker's line.

"With due caution, but without unnecessary care (for that only hampers you and leads to detection where boldness would carry you through), I got into the room and took a well-earned rest in the narrow space between my facsimile front and the real safe. Up to then I had no suspicion that anything was wrong; but in another moment I was undeceived.

"I wasn't in front of the safe at all—at least, not immediately. I was only a dummy in front of a dummy. I *was* dummy too, flummoxed by the sudden overwhelming conviction that I was neither original in my idea nor my purpose.

"The false front which I confronted was a better and more pretentious work of art than mine. It was good, solid timber, with



"I opened it, and found—the commission agent."—*p.* 99.

side wings, and I opened it with care and a chisel, and found—the commission agent, huddled up against the real safe, and looking painfully sick and silly.

“‘Hullo, Mr. ——!’ said I, for I was too flabbergasted to attempt to conceal my identity. ‘Playing hide and seek?’

“‘What do you want here?’ he snarled viciously.

“His terror gave place to anger, and between them I was inclined to believe that he was too far gone to recognise me.

“Oh! he was a precious crafty villain. It wasn’t terror or anger at all. I had played into his hands beautifully, and he couldn’t have bought the service I had come to do for him for a thousand pounds, cash down. It would have been risky, and required much too long a spoon.

“I said something about having come to look at the safe in a way that I hoped would suggest a properly accredited agent from the makers doing overtime.

“‘Oh!’ said he, with a breath of relief. ‘Well, just open it for me, will you? I have lost my key. You know how to do it, I suppose?’

“Even then I didn’t tumble to the villain’s purpose. It was so obvious that I looked beyond it, I suppose. Or perhaps it was that I was wondering quite how I was to secure the contents to myself under these changed circumstances. I need not have troubled myself!

"I made some little demur about spoiling the lock and that sort of thing, but my companion cut me short.

"‘Don’t try and humbug me,’ he snarled. ‘I know why you are here, and what you want. You came here to break open the safe. Now do it, or I’ll raise the alarm and let you explain the matter to a jury.’

"I did it! And all the while that beast stood there and sneered at my clumsiness and lack of skill. There was an element of humour in the situation, though I did not discern it till long afterwards—myself working away with brace and file to secure a nefarious entry into that safe, while the owner stood by with the key all the while in his pocket and exhorted me to further efforts with casual comments of a stinging nature in between. It took me nearly an hour to get through and force the lock, and when I did at last get the door open, there was absolutely nothing!

"My companion laughed a nasty, sneering laugh.

"‘Hardly worth the trouble, was it?’ he jeered. ‘Now you may go. You can send in your bill, you know, unless you work from purely philanthropic motives. Stop a bit, though. Haul that dummy of yours—it’s crude, but I suppose you couldn’t contrive anything better—close in. It fits up handily, doesn’t it? So does mine, which we can dispense with.’

"He pulled it to pieces as he spoke, and flung the parts on top of the safe.

“‘So,’ said he. ‘Now stand here, and don’t move unless you want to face that jury after all. I’m going to turn the light out.’

“He slipped across the room, flung the door wide open, and then rushing back extinguished the light, and was on top of me kicking, and struggling, and yelling like mad.

“For a moment I was dazed ; but if it was going to be a game of play-acting, I thought it would impart a little realism, and be more comforting to myself, if I contributed my share, and I hit out straight and hard. Over went the dummy front with ourselves on top of it, smash went something through the window—the beast slung it just as I was getting the whip hand of him—and then there was a scurry of feet, the sound of excited voices, and the next moment a policeman heading a crowd of men and boys burst into the room.

“‘Hold him,’ yelled my treacherous assailant, struggling to his feet and standing there panting, and torn, and blood-streaked from the encounter which he had himself precipitated. ‘Did you stop the other? There were two of them.’

“‘What is all this about?’ demanded the unemotional custodian of the peace.

“‘I’m darned if I know,’ said I simply. It is difficult to think of a likely and plausible lie under such circumstances, and it is safest to say nothing ; you don’t have to go back on your first statement, which is

sure not to fit with anything you can think of in the peaceful security of your cell during the next twelve hours or so.

"'It is burglary, policeman. Secure that man. I don't know what he has got yet; but they have forced my safe, and there was seven thousand pounds left there this evening.'

"The policeman whistled, and the audience nudged



A policeman heading a crowd of men and boys burst into the room."
—p. 101.

itself in breathless excitement at this sensational disclosure.

"'You must come along to the station,' said the official solemnly. 'Fetch one of my mates, you chaps.'

"Someone officiously obliged, and in a moment

policeman number two was in charge of the office, while I and my accomplice in the difficult art of safe-breaking, and a mob of men and youths of all classes and conditions, walked along to Blankgate Street.

"The commission agent came eagerly, as though it was what he had been looking forward to in anticipation for months; the public went from sheer curiosity; I, because I couldn't help myself.

"The charge was soon taken, and I must confess that the evidence against me was overwhelming. I refused to say anything; but that was only a negative help, while the contents of my pockets, my presence on the scene, and my position, were positive testimony, and the sergeant-in-charge consigned me to a cell straight away, and sent back a detective with the prosecutor to survey the scene, and make a search for my accomplice.

"I didn't understand until the next morning what had really happened. I got it then from the evidence offered before the magistrate. It was simple and convincing—to him.

"The prosecutor had been working late in the back office. He had finished, and was about to return to put his books away in the safe, when he was confronted by a couple of ruffians, including myself. One had dodged him and bolted, but the other he had grappled with, and at desperate peril, secured. The safe, it was found, had been forced under cover of a canvas

dummy, and absolutely ransacked. Several valuable documents and a heavy sum in notes and gold had been stolen.

"That was the story on which I was committed for trial as I heard it. It didn't tally with the version I knew; but I determined to wait for a better occasion to make that version known, and as a result it never was made known at all.

"To me in my cell at Holloway came my employer. I didn't send for him. I had given no name or address, but he came fully primed, and with a cunning knowledge of my identity, and the fact that the prosecutor was moving for and against me in the background.

"He was sorrowful and sympathetic, the wretched old humbug. He would do what his firm could for me; but I must know that I was in a hopeless case. If, however, my version of the affair was not made public, and it couldn't help me in the least if it were, the prosecution wouldn't press the charge vindictively. I thought of the offer, of my desperate position, and the absolute futility of resisting, and consented.

"I got four years."

"But," said I, "the commission agent knew that you were really after his money, and, since you were, you can hardly term the result an unforeseen contingency."

"No, possibly not," said Mr. Tutt drily; "but the fact that he had robbed his clients, and was endeavouring to hide the results of a fraudulent bankruptcy

under cover of a fake burglary when I arrived on the scene, was unforeseen.

“Without me he *might* have muddled through and failed honourably with the extenuating circumstances of a burglary which was never committed; but it was a risky expedient. With the burglar caught, caged, and convicted, suspicion was disarmed at once.”

CHAP. VII.

TWO OF A TRADE.

“**T**HE most complete and gigantic ‘do’ that I ever experienced, I think, was over that affair down in Essex last year,” said Mr. Tutt musingly.”

“Tell me about it,” said I simply, and he told me in plain and sometimes emphasized diction, without any unnecessary reserve or qualms of conscience over his breach of moral and constitutional laws.

“There was a little place out Chelmsford way,” he began, “I tumbled over in the course of my travels that looked as though it would repay me for any trouble or time I expended over it. It was not pretentious in any way, but it looked snug and comfortable, and, at the time I resolved to pay it a visit, it had the additional attraction of being left entirely to the charge of a doddering old couple while the family were away in London.

“From a professional point of view the job was contemptibly simple and easy ; but I was not seeking

credit so much as cash just then, and I felt that a simple compact affair such as that promised to be would better suit my purpose than an elaborate showy exploit which would necessitate a lot of preparation and possibly an accomplice.

"I went down from Liverpool Street by a late train so as not to have too much time on hand before commencing operations. It is risky for one of my calling to loaf round a strange neighbourhood under such circumstances, and obviously the less you are seen the better. In the carriage with me were a couple of farmers and an odd-looking little curate with watery blue eyes and straw-coloured hair, and a meek deferential I'm-only-a-worm-but-please-don't-tread-on-me bearing.

"At Brentwood the farmers turned out, and the curate and I had the carriage all to ourselves. I gathered during the journey, from a chance question, that my companion was going my way. It was a station on the Southend branch of the Great Eastern, and so when I happened to look out of the window and saw the lights of Ingatestone station whizzing by, I knew that I was not the only victim to the railway arrangements and my own carelessness.

"We were in the Chelmsford and Colchester part of the train. The rest had been slipped at a place called Shenfield, and my observations, which were forcible and free, drew my fellow traveller's attention to his own predicament.

“‘This is very unfortunate,’ he wailed. ‘I simply must get into R—— to-night.’

“‘If it comes to that, so must I,’ I said. ‘But I don’t see how, unless we walk. There is nothing on the line that will take us nearer than Shenfield to-night.’

“‘Couldn’t we drive?’ he queried anxiously. ‘I will pay anything in reason. Walking is out of the question ; it must be nearly thirty miles across.’

“‘A bit over that,’ said I. ‘As for driving, I have neither the means nor the inclination ; but if I can get my legs over a bicycle I’m all right. You can’t ride, I suppose.’

“‘Oh yes, I can,’ said the curate, bucking up wonderfully to emphasize his assertion of some claim—beyond his breeches—to be classed as a man.

“‘Well, in that case, all we need is a bike,’ said I simply.

“‘We can hire them, surely,’ suggested the curate.

“‘May be,’ said I, a bit doubtfully. ‘They might object to trust us, not knowing us ; but we can try.’

“To my amusement and the curate’s discomfiture and indignation the cycle dealer to whom we applied at Chelmsford did refuse to trust us point blank. He said he had been had that way the week before, and any way he did not care about obliging us because of the rush for hired machines which ensued on Thursday afternoons from emancipated shop assistants. And the next day was Thursday:

"A couple of machines which had been let out, presumably, were brought back at this juncture, and the man went inside to settle up with the riders.

"While he was gone an idea occurred to me.

"'Now's your chance! You take this and clear off,' said I to the curate. 'I will square it with the man. He ought to let us have machines if we want them. Anyway, if he fusses, you will be beyond recall. He will listen to reason, and take the money then, since he can't exercise any choice in the matter.'

"Rather to my surprise, the curate fell in with my suggestion, and a giddy figure he cut as he nipped into the saddle and scorched down the street.

"I gave him three minutes' start, and then I poked my head in at the shop door.

"'Hi, mister,' said I, working up a big excitement, 'that curate chap has sneaked your jigger! Look alive, or you'll lose it!'

"The man dropped everything and bolted out of the shop and down the street, shedding curse words as he ran. I reckon he said a lot more when he returned; but I wasn't there to hear, and his other machine was with me.

"It was a bit crocky, but good enough at a pinch, and I made a bit of a circuit round the town, came out in the Maldon Road, and got clear off with the machine and the price of its hire as well. It's sinful extravagance to pay for a thing when you can get it fairly heaved at you like that; but I must say I was a bit

surprised at that curate chap. Bicycle-sneaking doesn't fit the cloth a bit, and I rather hoped he'd get caught, if only to teach him a lesson in elementary honesty. Ah me! if he only had been—but he wasn't, as I was to learn.

"There is only one printable word which fairly describes that ride I had all by my lonesome, and that is 'rotten.'

"I had a puncture, lost my way twice, did seven miles without a lamp, and nearly got pulled up for it by a policeman, croppered in a ditch and bent the left crank, and landed at last dead tired and ravenous, and not feeling at all fit for the job before me. But I wasn't minded to be done out of the fruits of my efforts after all I had gone through, and I pulled myself together and got to work.

"First of all I hid the bike in a hedge opposite the house. I might want it again, I thought. Anyway, it would never do to abandon it on the spot so that the man in Chelmsford could give me away as soon as inquiries came to be made. The police would not trouble very much about a bicycle-sneak; but when a burglary was attached they would be keen enough to run me down, and they would do it too.

"Once inside, my first idea was to lay hold of some provisions, and I was getting on a treat with some bread and meat and a bottle of Bass, when who should walk into the kitchen but that very curate who had left me in such hurry at Chelmsford.

"He seemed as surprised as I was ; but of course he had not quite the reasons I had for being put out over the meeting. A burglar, if he is worth shucks at the game, has to have more pluck than a soldier and be readier than a politician ; he has to lie on the spur of the moment, and lie well, too, or he will get tripped before he has made enough to pay for his kit.

"I nodded affably to give myself time to think out a reasonable and likely explanation for my presence.

"The curate nodded back ; but he didn't help me out as I had expected him to do, and now I came to look at him in the full light there seemed to be a nasty quick look about his eyes that I didn't half like.

"'Had a nice ride ?' said I, helping myself to another glass of beer.

"'Not very,' said he drily. 'Our friend's machine was a bit out of date. So you arranged it satisfactorily ?'

"'Seven-and-six each and pay carriage back, unless we ride 'em,' said I. 'You needn't bother to settle up now, unless you wish to. It's odd we should both be coming to the same house.'

"This was by the way of a feeler, and it answered.

"'It is a bit,' said the curate. 'I'm taking a charge down here, and my cousin invited me to put up with him until I got settled. He's away just now, you know.'

"'Yes,' said I, nodding. 'That's chiefly why I am

here. *My* cousin is getting old, and she was afraid of being left alone with so many suspicious people about, so she asked me down until her master returned.'

"'Oh! so you're the housekeeper's guest,' said the curate, looking relieved. I believed the beggar had been suspicious of me. 'She told me that she expected you,' he continued.

"'The deuce she did,' thought I. 'Well, I hope I sha'n't arrive to-night, that's all.'

"There seemed to be a beastly lot of coincidence in the affair; but I consoled myself with the reflection that it was a fortunate shot, and as the real cousin couldn't get in before the morning, unless he, too, cycled or walked, I had no need to worry myself on that score.

"The curate wasn't half a bad chap—for a curate; and he was friendly, too, though the way he worried the beer when he sat down with a pipe to keep me company during the meal didn't seem quite the thing for a chap whose chief topic was temperance and the compulsory conversion of public-houses into cocoa-bars.

"I gave him a hint or two, hoping that he would take it and clear off to bed; but it was wasted. He was such a long-winded little fellow, and he prosed away until I fairly fell asleep in my chair. So did he, I suspect, though of course I could not say positively, because it was early morning when I was awakened, and by him. The lamp was out, but I could tell from his voice that he was in a state of intense nervous excitement.

“ ‘Keep silent,’ he whispered dramatically. ‘There’s somebody breaking in. I heard a cart drive up very quietly, and then someone creep round to the back.’

“I listened intently, and sure enough there was somebody at the breakfast-room window. I know the sound of a jemmy on a window sash well enough, and I could have laughed outright at the comedy of it if it had been prudent.

“ ‘Light the lamp,’ said I promptly, ‘that’s the best way of scaring them off.’

“ ‘Hush!’ he whispered. ‘They have a cart.’

“ ‘What the blazes has that to do with it?’ I queried in blank surprise.

“ ‘We may capture them, and then we can drive them to the nearest police-station and get assistance,’ he explained.

“I thought he had gone daft with fright ; but an idea came to me, and I fell in with his suggestion straight away. ‘Set a burglar to catch a burglar, you know!’ We went and hid ourselves, I behind the scullery door, and the curate behind the washing machine.

“ ‘Let them fill the cart,’ I had whispered. ‘We’ll have him then red-handed and all the evidence done up nicely and put on wheels—for me to get off with comfortably and conveniently,’ I added *sotto voce*.

“The curate was wonderfully amenable. I thought it was funk, and I didn’t set much store by the assistance he was likely to lend when it came to the tussle.

"That burglar knew his business down to the ground. I got a square look at him through the chink of the door, but I couldn't recognise him, though it was clear that he was an old hand at the game. He cleaned that house out beautifully, and by the time he had gone



"I got a square look at him through the chink of the door."—*p.* 114.

over it there wasn't enough portable property left behind to be worth the trouble of shifting.

"I thought the time was about ripe for action then, and on his last trip we followed him up and bagged him neatly with scarcely a scratch between us.

"To my surprise, that curate was a thoroughbred, and he seemed to know more about flooring a man than I did.

"‘It’s football,’ I thought to myself. ‘Those University fellows are always great at that, though I should not have expected it of this chap.’ All the same I admired the deft way in which he slipped between the fellow’s legs and heaved him over for me to grab him and hold him down.

"We tied him up between us, and left him swearing to himself in the chair I had vacated. The curate began to assert himself then, and I got a bit nettled at the masterly way he ordered me round and assumed the entire direction of affairs.

"‘Best put those things in the cart,’ he said, indicating the valuable silver stuff which had fallen from the burglar’s hands when we grabbed him. ‘We won’t take him along ; he might prove obstreperous, and in case he manages to free himself there won’t be anything valuable for him to steal.’

"I objected to the ordering, but the plan suited my book excellently, and I did as I was directed, adding a few odds and ends on my own account.

"At the last moment, just when we were ready to drive off, I thought of the bicycle I had hidden. From my point of view it was a bit necessary to take it along with us in case I should not come back ; but I didn’t quite see how to introduce the subject without arousing suspicion. I need not have worried had I but known

it, for the curate's plans included leaving myself as well as the bicycle. When he had said 'we' he was speaking generally, he explained, for of course there was no need for both of us to turn out, and, tied up though he was, he considered that the sullen and discontented man in the chair in the kitchen would be the better and safer for a little personal oversight. This was a facer ; but, of course, I couldn't allow it to be arranged anything like that.

"I protested on the score of an unselfish desire not to have that poor weak little cleric expose himself to the chill night air, and the dark lonely country roads. I said I could manage quite nicely alone, and I would be back in an hour at the latest with someone to take the care and responsibility of our prisoner off our hands.

"The curate got impatient, and tried to insist, so I insisted too, and at last, though with a very bad grace, he agreed that we should go together.

"It was the darkest hour just before the dawn, and with no lights on the trap and a total ignorance of the locality as far as I was concerned, we made very slow travelling. We were on the Rayleigh road, I supposed, and when we turned off sharply to the right I felt certain we were going wrong. I was working my brain for all it was worth to think out a plausible and possible way of shedding that curate ; for of course I had no real pressing desire to be run into the arms of the police, even under such fair-seeming circumstances as

these: And besides, I had another game on hand which would not be served in that way at all.

"We drove on and on into a dreary, forsaken strip of country, without a cottage anywhere to show that it was populated, and at last just as the day was breaking in a dim, misty, leaden gleam we came to a spot where four cross-roads joined, with a finger-post set in a surrounding circle of grass in the centre.

"‘Now which is the road,’ said the curate thoughtfully. He had been driving in a state of deep abstraction, and not a word passed between us until this minute.

"Of course I didn’t know; but it seemed to me that the knowledge of where we were *would* be useful, and the chance of going my way best served if I obtained the information myself, so I volunteered to get down and study the sign post.

"It was difficult to read in the half light, and while I was straining on tiptoe to make out the lettering I heard the smart crack of a whip followed by the rattling of wheels. I tore back cursing my folly; but by then the trap was a hundred yards down the road, and being driven in a way that plainly showed the purpose of the curate to get rid of me.

"Even then I had no idea of the real state of the case. I was filled with apprehension that my companion had got suspicious of me, and had taken this method of getting me out of the way in the interests of his cousin’s property and his own safety.

“‘That is why he was so precious anxious to leave me in charge of a comparatively empty house and a desperate burglar,’ I reflected bitterly. ‘Snaky brute. Surprises me a man of his cloth should stoop to such dirty, low-down dealing.’



“I heard the smart crack of a whip.”—*p.* 117.

“I was sold, desperately sold ; but it wasn’t any use hanging round there unless I wanted to lose liberty as well as loot.

Going back to the finger-post again, I discovered that we must have been driving in a circuit. We were within half a mile of where we had started. That solved the problem of how to get away for me at least, which had been worrying me pretty extensively. So back I went at a jog-trot, feeling very sick and dog tired.

"It was close on seven when I reached the house, and rather to my surprise it was still quiet. Perhaps the curate had lost himself again. Anyway he had not got back with the police, and taking a cautious survey round I sneaked up to the back of the house, and peeping in saw the burglar still tied up in the chair in an attitude of sullen dejection.

"I am a kind-hearted chap when it doesn't interfere with business, and anyhow he was a member of my profession, so I took the chances and wasted several precious minutes in going in and cutting him loose.

"‘No time to explain,’ I said. ‘We are on the same lay ; but luck isn't particularly good to either of us this time. Cut off and get clear is my advice. Never mind the trap.’

"‘I don't,’ said he briefly. ‘Tain't mine, anyhow. Ta, ta, and thanks, cully.’

"He nodded and was gone, and I followed him, fished out my bicycle, and set off along the Chelmsford road.

"For want of something better to do, I suppose—the thing wasn't worth stealing—I resolved to be honest

and ride that beastly old boneshaker back to its owner, and a gay sort of time I had of it. The morning turned in wet, and before I had got ten miles along the road I was in the midst of a drizzling rain which wetted me through without giving me any pretence for getting down for it.

"I plunged on through the mud and drizzle, and came into Chelmsford about ten. Just below the market place a policeman stopped me.

" 'Where did you get that machine ? ' he demanded.

" 'Hired it,' said I. 'It's not good enough to own, and not worth stealing. I'm taking it back now. You can come with me if you like.'

" 'I'm coming,' said he, in a nasty suspicious sort of way.

"We went! My reception was not cordial, and at first the man was for giving me in charge there and then ; but the policeman wasn't half a bad chap, though thick-headed. I explained all about getting in the wrong train, and that I had wanted the machine to go over and see my poor old mother who was very sick, and he took my part. He told the man he had best take my money and let the matter rest.

"The bicycle man stuck out on the score of the other machine ; but, as I said, that was nothing to do with me. I had only met the curate casually in the train, and if he had sneaked anything he had better answer for himself about it.

"The policeman said this was only reasonable, and

after that the man seemed inclined to let it go at that, until, in attempting to settle up, I found that I had been cleared out of every brass farthing I had about me, and my watch and chain had gone as well. Then the band played again, and in the end I was marched off to the station pending inquiries.

"Naturally I was in a blue funk, for I expected that curate to turn up and give me away; but not a sound or sign of him came along. So I got some cash down from London and squared up for the machine, and they were forced to let me go.

"I don't know what became of that curate, but I do know that the cart was found deserted near Wickford, and not a trace of the property that I had seen put into it was ever discovered."

"And you think," I suggested.

"Think," said Mr. Tutt, scornfully, "I don't need to think. I *know* that I was a blank fool, and that, curate or no curate, that smug little beast made one of the best hauls of the season, and included my cash and property in his catch. I made some inquiries afterwards, and found, as I expected, that there wasn't any curate cousin in the family any more than there was a housekeeper's cousin, though I believe that the fellow was as much taken in by me as I was by him—only he had the best of the deal."

CHAP. VIII.

CAGED COPPER.

“**Y**ES! well, perhaps country coppers *are* the easiest to deal with,” assented Mr. Tutt, opening out in another illuminating detail of his former exploits; “but I have done one or two jobs at the expense of the London lot. Did I ever tell you about that affair out at W——?”

“You didn’t, but you might,” I suggested pointedly, and my shady companion with a nod of acquiescence complied.

“I had gone out on a general beat up, not knowing of anything in particular, but ready, as you might say, to take advantage of what was going.

“I was resting a bit and not particularly pushed, you know, having brought off a fairly decent little haul down Windsor way; but it doesn’t do to get out of practice too much, and time and railway fare are well expended on trips like these.

“Maybe it is good luck, and maybe it ain’t; but when you are doing a big job like as not you go free of

interruption, and when you are doing nothing but walking out to get a breath of fresh air, as innocent as a babe in long clothes, up comes a copper, and before you know what is up you are bagged ; and let me tell you, when once you are known, and they get you like that, it's long odds against you getting away again inside six months.

"Well, that's just how it was this time. I had stopped for a bit to rest after a longish walk, when a hand was suddenly clapped on my shoulder, and a voice said : 'What are you doing here?'"

"Whereabouts were you resting," I interrupted, growing suddenly interested.

"Outside the windows of a biggish house which had a sight of pretty things displayed about the tables, that made me think perhaps a marriage or something was going on," explained Mr. Tutt, with a sly grin.

"It was a blue-coated arm that belonged to that hand. I knew that much without looking, and I knew a few other useful things as well—as much almost as a suburban bobby.

"'Watching the presents,' said I, as easy and unconcernedly as I could make my voice sound.

"The bobby laughed—a nasty, short, spiteful laugh.

"'Cool,' said he.

"'Cool? Beastly cold, I call it,' said I. 'One thing, the old man's a good sort with no teetotal nonsense about him, and there'll be a glass of something warming

as well as a bob or two perks for me out of the job.'

"'Job?' said he.

"'Yes,' said I. 'What else do you suppose I'm standing in these blistering bushes for—the benefit of my health? Private, you know; laid on because the old buck thinks the local police are a blithering lot of fools and not to be trusted.'

"He squirmed; but he took his hand off my shoulder, and got a bit more civil.

"'I heard something about it,' he remarked vaguely. 'The girl's getting married to that young chap up at the Towers to-morrow, isn't she?'

"'That's the size of it,' said I carelessly. 'And I only wish I had a few of the things she's taking with her for my own.'

"That cop was a youngish chap and very decent; but oh, so green! He told me all about himself, and that he'd come up from Norfolk, and had been in the force three years, and all about his beat and when the relief would be round. It was a perfect god-send to me, and I saw with half an eye that there was no reason why I shouldn't do the job after all—except for the cop himself.

"In a minute my mind was made up, and I resolved to chance it on a simple little plan that I had tried before and found to act like a charm.

"'You could do with a wet, I daresay,' said I, as he prepared to move on.

"He could! I have never met a policeman yet who couldn't.

"A flask I generally carry, and fortunately had with me, did the trick beautifully. It held whiskey—and other things. Knock-out drops the Yanks call them, and they are warranted to put a man to sleep inside five minutes.

"In half that time he was downright silly, and by the time I had led him round to the back of the house and got him into an old wood shed he was past being interested in anything.

"When I left the stable I was wearing my prisoner's helmet and boots and big coat, which turned me into a pretty fair sort of policeman, and it is as well they did, for I had barely got buttoned-up and tidied when the short, springy step of a horse sounded on the road a little below me.

"Should I lay low and say nothing? If I did, the chances were that the inspector—I knew from information received that he was due—would in all probability cover the beat, and then, not seeing anything of the man on duty, would begin to make inquiries. I am of a sensitive, retiring disposition, and I was particularly anxious just then that inquiries should not be made. Besides, it was unkind to the poor chap in the shed, who might get a wiggling and lose his promotion for something which he couldn't help. I believe in justice without any law attached, and so, as I knew he wouldn't recognise me in the dark, I stepped out of the gate and

flashed the lantern on the horse and rider opposite me.

"He was a dry, withered-up looking little beast of a chap, and his voice was a positive snarl.

"What are you lounging in there for, Brant? Smoking again, I suppose?"

"Smoked and cured by now, sir," said I, saluting. It was difficult to be civil, but that was part of the game I was playing.

"It's burglars, sure enough, sir," I explained. 'Watched them for half-an-hour from behind the bushes, and would have nabbed them clean, only in sneaking round they heard me and bolted. After the presents, I think, sir.'

"Confound you for a fool!" was the comment of the ungrateful brute. 'Why the deuce couldn't you go down to point and get assistance? Which way did they go?'

"Two went across into the woods opposite, sir," said I with simple dignity. 'The other chap stopped with me. Big chap, too! I believe it's the Lipwood gang, and we've got the leader.'

"Got him, Brant! got him!" snapped my superior officer.

"Fancy making all that fuss about catching a poor wretched burglar! I could have kicked the beast for the gloat his tone conveyed.

"Yes, sir. Trussed up in the stable, and seeming very unhappy about something," said I, innocently.

“‘That’s good! I’ll see you are mentioned for this, Brant,” said he patronizingly.

“‘My word, I’ll bet you will,’ thought I, only I didn’t say it. ‘May be, if I lay low and keep quiet, the others will come back, sir,’ I suggested instead.

“‘Yes, or drop into the station below and save us trouble,’ said he sarcastically. ‘Let’s have the one you’ve got and make certain of him. Where’s your badge?’

“Thoughtlessly leaning forward to pat the horse, my coat had come within range of the light, and as sharp as a flash came the query.

“‘Torn off in the struggle, sir, I expect,’ said I, looking more surprised than I felt to notice that it was missing.

“‘Umph. What sort of a fellow did you say he was, Brant?’

“‘Big, sir; big and vicious,’ said I. ‘It’ll be a bit of a job to get him along to the station without assistance.’

“‘Oh, we’ll see about that,’ said he, bumptiously. ‘Just catch hold of my horse.’

“He dismounted, and under his direction I fastened his steed to the gatepost, and then led the way round to the back premises.

“My first idea had been to make one bin serve for the double load of official dust I had gathered up, but a little easy reflection showed me that this wouldn’t do at all. I wasn’t at all sure of the state of things at

the woodshed then. This interview had occupied a considerable number of good and useful moments, and I couldn't tell just how my captive might have been employing them. If he had come to, he might put me in a very awkward position.

"There was no lack of suitable sheds and outhouses, fortunately, and selecting one that seemed to be devoid of windows and provided with a stout and useful bar to serve as a fastening to the door, I led the way across to that, with the inspector following eagerly in my wake.

"I peered in hurriedly as if oppressed with a momentary anxiety, and then in tones of chastened joy and pride, I whispered: 'There he is, sir. Just over by that heap.'

"'I don't see anything, Brant,' said the inspector, crowding past me in his eagerness.

"'Well, see if you can smell it, then,' said I, seizing the opportunity and my superior officer and giving him a heave which sent him sprawling over the unalluring heap.

"Before he could recover himself I was well outside the



"Sent him sprawling."—p. 128.

shed and had the door barred, and my second capture for that night was complete.

“‘Now for the third,’ said I to myself—meaning, of course, the plate and property in that drawing-room. But my luck had changed while I was enjoying it, and when I got round to the front again I found a fresh enemy in the field. A white-haired, high-class old cock he was, and I didn’t want telling to know that the loot was lost to me for that go anyway.

“‘Anything wrong, policeman?’ he asked, stepping through the French windows that opened out on to the path in front of the house.

“‘No, sir,’ said I promptly saluting. ‘Thought I heard suspicious sounds round the house, sir—taking special precaution to-night, sir.’

“‘That’s right, my man. Here’s half-a-crown to drink my daughter’s health with to-morrow. Dismal night you have got for—— What’s that?’

“As a matter of fact it was the inspector raising Cain with a stout regulation boot against the door of the shed, and it was so pronounced that I abandoned my first intention of pretending that I couldn’t hear anything.

“‘One of the horses, I expect, sir,’ I suggested. ‘Sounds like kicking.’

“‘Ah, very likely,’ he agreed. ‘It’s that young colt, vicious brute! Best go and see if I can quiet it, though. It’ll kick the stable to bits, and perhaps injure one of the other——’

"A splintering crash interrupted him, and it didn't need the appearance of the sergeant round the corner to tell me that one of my birds was at liberty again, and if I would retain mine I'd best make tracks.

"I did—without even stopping to say 'Good-night.' Skipping through the gate, I recollected with the sight of it the inspector's mount, and hastily detaching the reins I was into the saddle and pelting down the road before you could say 'Jack Robinson.'

"Having put a good and useful seven miles of main and cross-country road between myself and the scene of my exploit, I began to grow a bit anxious about dropping my disguise and getting into safe quarters.

"Of course, I could have abandoned the horse along with the helmet and cloak, but that meant a long walk at the best, and under the circumstances it was decidedly dangerous. Ordinary people like you have no idea of the attention that is paid them should they go strolling about in strange localities at night. If you don't believe me, try some little provincial town; leave your hat behind, and hang about a bit as if waiting for the first train for anywhere. Possibly you would not recognise it for what it really is; but you won't be on view half-an-hour before a friendly policeman asks the time, or for a match, and he'll ask a lot of other things as well which you won't in the least mind talking about.

"I didn't want any of that, and I didn't want a long

walk. Luckily I saw how to dodge both when I came across an empty hay waggon drawn up by the side of the road, the driver asleep or drunk inside it, and everything looking as straight and simple as if it had been specially arranged to help a poor chap like myself out of a difficulty.



"The man was sleeping like a log."

—p. 131.

"The man was sleeping like a log, and I got his cap and put the policeman's helmet in its place, in case the poor chap should take cold, without disturbing him. The cloak I wrapped round him, and chucking the breeches, which I had worn over my own, and the lantern into the cart, and changing boots with him, I put the officer's mount in

the shafts in place of the cart-horse, and went lumbering off on that, sitting sideways, and too sleepy and surly to do more than grunt a heavy 'good-night' to the policemen I passed.

"I crossed the Epping road just before daybreak, and on the crest of the big hill which dips down into

Waltham I calculated on letting the horse go and taking a short cut through the trees and bushes of the forest which borders the road on both sides. I had got off for this purpose when a chap with a bike showed up halfway down the hill. He was shoving it along in front of him, and looked as if he'd had a pretty fair doing.

"'Come far?' said I, when he got opposite me and stopped to take a breather.

"'Far enough,' said he. 'Broxbourne; but I don't get on with these beastly things at all. Going uphill you have to shove 'em, and going down they run away with you and do their level best to break your neck.'

"'You should have one of this sort,' said I, nodding towards the horse. 'They don't want shoving, and they won't run for anything you can do or say. Looks a decent jigger. Do you mind me having a go? I can ride all right, and won't crock it up.'

"'It ain't that,' said he. 'But you might forget to come back.'

"'What, and leave you with the guv'nor's horse? That's very likely, ain't it?' said I. 'I may be a yokel, but I ain't quite a fool, mister!'

"'Oh, no offence,' said he, hastily. 'Of course, I didn't think of the horse. Yes, you can try it if you like.'

"I did try it, and I liked it so much that I kept trying it all the way into Edmonton. What shocking

liars some chaps are! That fellow told me he had come from Broxbourne, and the first chap I met in Edmonton butted me off the bike and swore I had stolen his machine.

"It was awkward—very awkward. Of course, I hadn't stolen the machine—leastways, I hadn't stolen it from him. But he insisted that I had; the police seemed to think it very likely I had, and the magistrate



"Swore I had stolen his machine."—*p.* 133.

was so positive I had that he gave me six months, and that was what I got for all the trouble and risk I had been exposed to. I daren't squeal, I daren't say a word in defence of myself in case they sent me for trial and found out things which I preferred they shouldn't know, So I took the six months and did

'em, though I was as innocent as a new born babe."

"What became of the horse?"

"I never learnt, though I took considerable pains to," said Mr. Tutt. "Not, of course, that I cared a frippence about the brute; but I felt that I wanted to meet the low-down thief I left it with just for half a jiffy. There was a thing or two I needed to tell him, too, which, though he might not have wanted to hear, would have been good for him to listen to."

"Um," said I doubtfully. "Have a drink?"

"Right you are," returned Mr. Tutt.

CHAP. IX.

UNLUCKY DIAMONDS.

“**T**HOSE who say there isn't no such thing as luck don't know much, and that is a fact,” said Mr. Tutt, reflectively.

“You think there is, then?” said I, artfully leading my quondam protégé on in the hope of obtaining further insight into the details of a life spent along the broad and crooked highway.

“I am past thinking; I know,” was the emphatic rejoinder. “Only there's two kinds of it, and you can never be sure which particular brand you are handling. Of course, it ain't really the luck which alters, but yourself. For instance, when a policeman nabs me coming out of a house where I have just stepped in a moment to light my pipe, that's luck for both of us, only mine's bad and his is good. If I can contrive to trip him up and get away we're still in luck, only the circumstances have changed a bit, and mine is rosy and his is in the gloaming.”

“I see,” said I, nodding. “I suppose there is a

good deal of superstitious feeling among the fraternity—don't go out when the moon is full, and turn back on meeting a black cat, and that sort of thing. What is your especial hoodoo?"

"Diamonds," said Mr. Tutt, unexpectedly dramatic. "I have come a cropper as often as most, and every time I have noticed there has been diamonds in the case. To me they are downright unlucky, and though, mind you, I shouldn't let that stand in the way of having a shy at a good thing if I saw it, I should be prepared to look out for squalls if I came across even so much as a small diamond set in a ring or brooch of the stuff I was handling."

"That sounds interesting," I remarked. "As a theory of the influence of matter over mind it is distinctly unique. Can you give me any good illustration in support of it?"

"No," said Mr. Tutt, thoughtfully. "No! you get a conviction of that sort from long experience."

"Out of convictions conviction is born," I suggested.

"Pretty much," acknowledged my companion with a wry smile over the recollection of his many convictions which led to his conviction. "Take the case of the Kamscott diamonds. As a matter of fact I *did* literally and actually, and such another ghastly week as I had of it over those wretched bits of glass, followed by a month's graft for doing nothing but waste a big lump of my constitution and a week of my time I hope never again to spend."

"How did it happen? Easy. I was down on my luck at the time. I had done a brief stretch for a suspected job in London, and thinking that a change of air would be good for my nerves I went down Chelmsford way, and tried my hand in the fields at pea-picking.

"It didn't take much of that to satisfy me. The work was hard, and the company was about as rough and tough a lot as you could put together out of the slums of any three big towns. I turned it up after a week of it, and making my way along the Colchester road I sized up one or two likely places, and decided to operate at a biggish house that stood off the main road near a town called Witham.

"While prospecting round I ran across a man I had worked with. He had got a good thing on, he told me, and if I liked to share in there was room. Generally, I prefer to work single-handed; but just then I wasn't inclined to be over-particular, and it turned out that this job was big enough to divide. My share was to stand the racket while my pal got away with the stuff. I could see that as soon as he let me into particulars. He was a sight too generous not to have a purpose, and although I couldn't quite see just where I was to be let down, I knew very well that I came in along with the police. Brown was good-natured enough to give a pal in the downs half-a-crown or so at a pinch; but he wasn't quite the sort to boom a one-man job into a syndicate out of pure benevolence.

"He had got it all worked out so that a mere beginner

could have finished it. It wasn't a burglary at all ; it was just a country holiday with all expenses paid, and a nice little bit to go back with.

"Brown showed me the house that afternoon, and he said we'd do the job the following day. My part was simple. I was to go up to the front of the place in the dusk, and risk a month by pretending to be drunk and disorderly and carrying on there so as to get the servants to the front of the place while he worked the show from the rear. I wouldn't have minded doing that so much if I had had any confidence in my partner. As it was, I guessed pretty well that if I got the month it was all that I should get, and if I didn't I shouldn't get anything. I didn't tell Brown exactly what I thought of his plan ; but I slipped him, and went off on my own that very night to see if I couldn't work it a bit more to my own advantage. Apart from the indignity, it was a little twopenny-ha'penny sneak thief way of setting about the thing, and a burglar has just as much professional pride as a lawyer, and a deal more straightforwardness.

"Well, the house was dead easy. I walked round it once, and then the softness of the thing overcame me, and I resolved to settle it there and then, and get back to town straight away. I hadn't any tools with me, so I had to go round a second time in search of the easiest way in. I had located a pair of French windows at the side, and had got back the catch of the fastener, when I heard a window above me being gently raised. Hesitating

whether to bolt for it, or stand close and trust to luck and the darkness, I stood there when a cautious voice whispered, 'Is that you?' 'Yes,' I whispered back; truthfully, too, for it was me unquestionably.

" 'Well, this is what I want you for,' continued the voice, which was thick and husky, suggesting that the owner had been having a good time with himself. 'Brown is down here on the lay. He has got hold of the idea that I have got more out of that last job than I owned up to, and I am dead sure he means to have a cut at me. That ain't all. The police have got some idea things ain't exactly square, and they're beginning to show more interest than I care for. I'd skip if I could, but I can't leave things here or they'd smell a rat at once. Now, if I get the stuff out of the way I can stop on and attend to them, and at the same time save Brown from committing a crime.

" 'It was a cheap lot. Ah! ah! He worked it beautifully for me, and I got the cream of the job. That's what they call a fair division of labour.

" 'Here they are, take them straight to Peter's, and tell him to wait until he hears from me.'

" A soft thud on the lawn beyond me was followed by the stealthy lowering of the window above, and all was silent again.

" I waited a moment, too surprised at this unexpected development to do anything. A small black object lay in the middle of the lawn, and, grabbing it up, I streaked tip-toe across the grass and gained the seclusion of a

clump of bushes that fringed the walk dividing the garden from the road.

"Sounds of footsteps hastily approaching along the road stirred me into action. They slackened as they drew opposite the house ; then I heard them pass on, cease, and then retrace their way, going softly, disclosing a keen desire on the part of the owner to avoid attracting attention. There was a rustle among the bushes, and my artful friend Brown crept through them, and passed within twenty yards of me on his way up to the house.

" 'Honour among thieves,' I chuckled. 'That's the first move. If he gets what he wants, well and good. If not, he'll find me and have another shot at ten to-morrow with my aid. And, I bet, he won't say much about this first try.'

"I watched him gain the side of the house and disappear round the corner, then I nipped over the wall, and started along the road at a steady trot. I kept going until three or four miles separated me from the scene of my frustrated enterprise.

"Then I halted to see what I had captured. I didn't suppose it was anything very much, because the burglar's providence is of a shy and retiring disposition, and doesn't ordinarily arrange to have valuables shied out of top floor windows to him. It helps those who help themselves, and leaves the policeman's providence to do the best it can for its protégés. I took out the case, and by the aid of a match I unfastened it, and

glimpsed the contents. Then I stood gasping like a flat flounder on a bank while the match burned down and brought me to a recollection of where I was by endeavouring to set light to my fingers. The case, about nine inches square and thick in proportion, was just crammed with diamonds. They shone in myriad hues from the black velvet background, and I knew without telling that luck had tossed contemptuously to my feet a fortune that a lifetime of honest burgling would not have procured me.

"It occurred to me, as I closed the case and carefully returned it to my pocket, that the sooner I got away the better it would be. The heavy rumble of wheels approaching me suggested the possibility of a lift on my road, and I waited by the wayside for the vehicle to come up. It proved to be a furniture van returning empty, as the hollow rattle of it betokened, and, watching my chance, I slipped behind, and had the luck to find the doors swinging loose. In I crept, and on a pile of old straw that littered the floor, made for myself a comfortable and secure resting-place.

"I suppose I must have slept. I have no recollection of dropping off, but suddenly the rumble of the wheels was mixed with men's voices, the door of the van was slammed, and the clanking of a heavy bar indicated the disquieting fact that I was caged beautifully. I tried the doors carefully to make quite sure of the thing, but there was no sense in dodging the fact, and seeing that it was a fact I went back to the straw and slept

again, while the van rumbled heavily on through the night.

"I was released early in the morning, when a sudden gleam of sunlight in my eyes awoke me once more. The door had been thrown open, and a man's head and shoulders were framed in it. Beyond, the yard of a wayside inn showed, and beyond that the gleam of water. We had evidently drawn up for early morning refreshment, and I knew enough of the country to know that we were on the borders of one of the large estuaries,



"A man's head and shoulders were framed in it."—p. 142.

near to Maldon in all probability, since we could hardly have got as far south as the Thames.

"'Hello?' said the man who had disturbed my slumbers. 'What are you doing here?'

“‘Resting,’ I said casually.

“‘Oh,’ said he, with genial sarcasm. ‘Well, are you nicely rested?’

“‘Fairish,’ said I. ‘Enough to go on on foot, anyhow. Where are we?’

“‘Handy to a pub.,’ said he, significantly. ‘We don’t take passengers in a regular way, but seeing that you’ve had your lift without troubling about our permission——’

“‘All right,’ said I; ‘I gather, and it’s worth a drink or two.’

“So it may have been, only I was out of funds, and the bob or two I had with me were too valuable just then to be spent in filling up bumpkins with beer. Anyway, I didn’t think it would be very difficult to slip off so long as I contrived to keep the men good-tempered and unsuspecting. I chummed up while he had a sluice under the pump in the inn yard, and was getting on fine, when, in hanging up my coat for my turn at the pump, the darned case slipped out of my jacket, and, butting on the stones, flew open and disclosed the nature of the contents.

“‘Here, I say!’ said one of the men, suddenly suspicious. ‘What’s that?’

“‘Fake jewellery,’ said I, on the spur of the moment. ‘I am on tramp with it, and a precious rotten show it is. Will you have a couple of bob’s worth. It isn’t bad stuff, and looks well enough under the sun. The missus will like it.’

"The men whispered together, and I caught the ominous word 'reward,' from which I gathered that the sooner I got away the healthier it would be for myself. I got! My unwitting carriers had gone inside in pleasant anticipation of the beer I was to pay for, and in the full belief that I was following. So I was, as far as the van. I left at that point, and, keeping it between myself and observation from the men, I doubled out on to the road and streaked for freedom.



"The darned case slipped out of my jacket."—*p.* 143.

"In a small boat lying in a creek I found it, and a very heavy price I paid for it, for in leaning over to unfasten the boat something fell out of my pocket and went down in three feet of salt water.

"I felt for the case, and it was gone. Thick, black mud was at the bottom, and after frantically groping round for the case I had to let it abide there for the present and see to my own safety. Across the angle of salt water round which I had doubled I could make out a number of excited men, and in advance of them all was a blue helmet.

"I left the boat where it was, and, keeping well under cover, I managed to work round the estuary and place an old smack that was lying at anchor on the mud between myself and possible observation. That old tub gave me an inspiration. She was not very far out, and seemed scarcely to be floating. If I could only reach her it was an even chance that I could stow myself away on board somewhere until the pursuit drew off, and the fall of the tide would allow me to go back and recover my property.

"It was a sickening, nerve-shaking job, getting on board. The water wasn't deep, but the mud was, and I ploughed knee-deep through it, pausing on one leg while I literally hauled the other out of a foot of tenacious slime, and planted it down a pace ahead. I was gasping like a porpoise when I reached the side of the smack, and stood waist deep in mud and water to recover my breath for the task of hauling myself on board. As I had suspected, the craft was still on the mud, and from the look of her I judged that she would never leave it except when the tides floated her off for an hour or two, and dropped her again to rot out her

timbers, which would have served a more useful purpose as firewood.

“Anyhow, she was distinctly a friend in need to me, and glad enough was I when I hauled myself over the side and crept down into the cabin. Then, like Brer Rabbit, I ‘lay low and said nuffin.’ There was a lot of water in her, and presently, as I sat scraping myself clear of the worst of the mud, I noticed this was rapidly increasing. At first I wasn’t much concerned, but when it began to wash round my feet as the boat rose up on an even keel and began to sway to the motion of the waves I took a more serious view of the situation.

“I thought I understood then why pursuit had not set my way. It was hardly worth hunting me when the rising tide would shortly compel me to go up on deck and yell for assistance. I went above cautiously and took a survey of the surroundings. No one was in sight, and there didn’t seem to be anyone about the inn or on the shore. I went back, and found the water much higher than when I had left—almost up to a green ring that fringed the mast. I had wondered about that ring when I had first noticed it. Then I realised. It was high water mark in the cabin, caused by the repeated ebb and flow of the tides, and I could reasonably calculate that I was safe from shipwreck if the comfort of the situation would not be materially improved by the irrigation.

“For hours I lay about the deck hungry and wet, and

mudded from head to foot. As the tide dropped the sun went in behind a heavy bank of clouds, and a terrific thunderstorm broke overhead, and gave me a fresh water wetting by way of variety to the salt one I had already experienced.

"I stood by the boat until dark, when I got on shore and spied out the land. There didn't seem to be any sign of undue excitement about the inn, and I guessed that the interest in me had died a speedy death when the vanmen left. After all, they would be more likely to consider that I had taken the road and made for some town than elected to remain. You always are expected to cut and run, and the surest way of evading capture when you are hunted is to stay where you are and watch the pursuit go by.

"I didn't venture into the inn, but walked a mile along the road to another, and got something to go on with in the shape of grub stuff. Then I came back and hunted in the mud for three solid hours, but nothing could I find, and the rising tide put an end to my efforts, and drove me back to the smack for shelter. This silly, sloppy, muddy game went on all the week. When my money gave out I contrived to steal a loaf or two from the inn, and kept going on that. I couldn't leave the place, and I wouldn't, and what would have happened I don't know. I should be down there now I expect, like that ancient mariner chap, in rags and mud digging for diamonds and living on samphire and raw cockles.

"I was saved by a policeman, who came up with a fat, fussy chap, just when, for about the fortieth time, I had got my boots off, and, with trousers turned up, was wading out into that beastly mud-hole. They asked me, more as a matter of form, I think, what I was doing. In their minds they had formed an unshakable conclusion. I strengthened it. I always had a sense of

humour, and the words of an idiotic nursery jingle coming back to me at this unpropitious time, I remarked that I was a

'One-eyed ox opening oysters.'

"They didn't know about the ox or the eye, but they seemed certain concerning the oysters, and my reply settled the matter.

"I was pinched, and given a month by a slab-sided, pompous old fool of a magistrate. And for what, do you think? Interfering with



"They asked me what I was doing."—*p.* 148.

an oyster bed. That, and a go of rheumatism was my little lot for all that I had undergone."

"But surely," said I, anxiously, "you went back after the diamonds. You didn't leave them in the mud, did you?"

"I didn't go back," said Mr. Tutt, drily. "There were plenty more months in stock, and I reckoned one was sufficient. The diamonds? Oh, yes! They found the case on the shore the first morning. It was washed up on the beach, and was there all the time I was poking about in the mud after it. I never reckoned on it floating, you see; and I did not know as much about tides then as I do now."

"That," said I, "was unfortunate; but the cream of the story is not here."

"No," my companion admitted thoughtfully, blowing a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling. "No, I got the cream from a pal of mine in London, though I can't say I considered it in the light of cream. He told me, without knowing I had been in it at all, and rather as a good joke on Brown. The house, it seems, that I had arranged to help Brown to burgle belonged to a chap in our profession. He and Brown had got hold of the diamonds with some other things from a railway station in London. He let on to Brown that there was no diamonds there at all, but Brown was suspicious, and tracked him down into the country.

"Brown had got it all worked out nicely for himself, only Providence, in the shape of me, came between. I would have had the stones anyhow, but the artfulness of the other chap, who was afraid of Brown, gave them to

me easier than I had expected. Anyway he was left, and I was left, and so was Brown.

"The diamonds got back to their owners, of course. I was the only one who got anything at all out of the rotten little comedy, and I got a month for trespassing on an oyster bed. I have never liked oysters since."

CHAP. X.

SPOILING THE EGYPTIANS.

"**A**S a rule," began Mr. Tutt, thoughtfully, in reply to a casual observation I made respecting the difficulties and dangers of his late profession, "the bigger the game, the safer and easier it is. That applies in other things, too."

"Of course," said I, "I know what you mean, but I should not have thought it, or why do you hear so much of petty thefts and trivial little lootings, and so little, comparatively speaking, of really big enterprises?"

"Not because of the difficulty of carrying them out," replied my companion, emphatically. "It is as easy—I won't say easier—to steal a thousand pounds as it is a pair of boots.

"I remember a job of that sort which I pulled off up North, and at one time I was proud of it. Now, of course, I see that that sort of thing ain't right, and wickedness is not made any the better by being smart and clever.

"I won't name the town," he continued, after a brief pause, "but they say that you don't need to carry coals to it, and that may be a sort of a guide."

"Newcastle?" I interrupted.

"I didn't go up with any special purpose, and I might just as well have gone anywhere else, but I had a bit of money, and an inclination for a change of air, and I chose that for want of a better. It wasn't all holiday, because I had my eyes open for anything that came along, and I wanted to make it a good, big job, just to see what I could do in that way."

"I see," said I, "you didn't want a boot shop."

"No, nor a twopenny-ha'penny private house with a silver sugar bowl set in the middle," said he. "I didn't know what I did want myself, but a bank or a safe deposit vault would have been within the mark."

"I had a bit of money with me, as I have said, and I did myself rather well, putting up at a decent hotel near the station, and giving out that I was up on business of a secret and rather important nature. So I was, you know!

"I spent a few days in looking about me, and during that time I picked up with a fellow in the smoking-room of the hotel who was managing a branch of a big investment concern in the town, he told me. He was new to the job, and, not having made many friends so far, was willing to be chummy with me. In fact,

he was a nuisance to begin with, because I couldn't shake him off in the evenings, which was just when I wanted to get round a bit, and look out for something likely in my line.

"I had my own ideas about his friendliness, and though I couldn't quite form any good reason for it, I distrusted the chap. For one thing, he talked too much, and the very first night he told me in confidence that he had won fifty pounds at a private club where play was carried on to a rather reckless extent.

"I got interested at that, though not in the way he had expected I should be. I had heard of these places, and there are plenty about. If you can only get inside you don't need to go to Monte Carlo to get rooked. I didn't quite understand his drift then, but I did later. I was supposed to be a man with plenty of money, and from his subsequent remarks, I gathered that he was willing to pilot me to this temple of prosperity, where I could increase it—or drop it.

"At first I paid but little attention, but, thinking the matter quietly over, I suddenly realised that I might very well chance the twenty pounds I had about me, with a few hundred in promises and bogus draughts, to get an opportunity to measure up this place and loot it at my convenience. If it was anything like the dens I had heard of in London, there would be something in it worth handling, and mostly in good sound cash and notes.

"He was very close and reserved as to the whereabouts of the place, so I had no chance to investigate it for myself beforehand, but, anyway, I was tired of loafing, and there was a jeweller's in the town I had my eye on already that would help to pay my expenses and leave enough over for profit, which is rather more than you expect from any ordinary holiday."

"It is," I agreed, feelingly. "As a rule I am content if I have sufficient over to come back with. There are lots of compensations in your recent occupation. I wonder you manage to tear yourself away from it."

"There are a few drawbacks, too," Tutt remarked, drily. "In the present circumstance, there were chances which I hadn't reckoned on. For one thing, I had too many accomplices."

"Accomplices?" said I. "I thought you always worked single-handed."

"Oh, these volunteered," explained Tutt. "For preference, I should have worked alone, but the strength and beauty of the whole county police force were placed at my disposal, and I couldn't very well shake them off."

"It began one night when I had left my casual companion, and was going for a stroll round just to see that that jeweller's was still solvent, and, maybe, to look up a few details of doors and windows, and things. In the hall of the hotel a tall, thin gent., with a keen eye and a military manner, stopped me. I had noticed him hanging round pretty consistently the last

day or two, and there was something in his manner more than his appearance which reminded me unpleasantly of some acquaintances I had been forced to make at Brixton and Newgate.

"However, I didn't need to worry myself. He was a 'tec., and he told me so outright. I was a soft, innocent little pigeon, and he was taking care of me. Incidentally he and his friends wanted to take care of the hawks with which I was threatened, and if I would go on and be plucked of a few feathers, I should lose nothing and gain considerably.

"It was awfully kind of him, and I shook him by both hands at once in pure gratitude and derision to think what a very different sort of greeting he would be extending if he knew my name and occupation. In a small inn down by the bridge, where he led me, I got a lot of useful information which enlightened me considerably concerning my hotel acquaintance and the pretty game that was being played between two factions with which I had not the slightest sympathy.

"There was a big gambling den being run in a private house out on the Berwick road, and though the police were wide awake to what was going on, they couldn't get any evidence that would justify a raid or ensure its safety. My friend was nothing more nor less than a cute swindler, who had been run out of the Midlands, and was plying his 'investment' concern up North, to the loss of many, and in flagrant

defiance of the law. I had been seen with him under circumstances which justified my natural enemies in believing that I was a pigeon being prepared for plucking, and they had arranged a scheme by which they could raid the place, backed by good evidence and the certainty of obtaining a conviction."

"How you must have smiled!" I commented.

"I enjoyed it," admitted Mr. Tutt, with dry relish. "I would have liked it even better if I could have run in a bill for expenses on them, but the detective didn't offer anything, and I hardly saw my way to proposing it. Anyway, I did better by leaving it alone, because I got his complete confidence, which no paid agent would have done, and for my purpose that was what the French call a 'sinky quinine.'

"I played the game beautifully, too, all the way round, and there were the poor little hawks rubbing their hands over the pigeon they were going to pluck nice and bare, on the one side, and the sly cuss chums of the pigeon waiting on the other for him to twitter the signal to come in and help themselves to hawk meat. Yes, I smiled! In fact, I was a perfectly gay pigeon all round, but I had to do a lot of brain work to see just how I was to steer between the enemy and come out with a feather or two for myself.

"We went out in a cab the first night of my visit, and when I saw the place I had to give up my idea of doing the trick, which was just to locate it, find out the way it was run, and then drop in after hours

and help myself. It was a roomy, bare old house, standing back in its own grounds a mile or two out of the town, but whoever had contrived it knew too much for any burglar working single-handed. I have never seen a place bolted, and barred, and shuttered as that was. It would have done at a pinch for a jail. All the ground floor windows and doors were either bolted or screwed up, and it would have puzzled a cat to find a way in without invitation.

“‘Why,’ I said to the chap who was guiding me, ‘you could coin money here, and no one would be any the wiser.’

“‘We do,’ says he, with a short laugh. ‘Some of us do, that is. Of course, the bank always comes out best in the long run, and they can stand a reverse. I myself have found my quiet game profitable.’

“He chuckled some more, and so did I, though we were looking at the joke from different points of view. Well, I sized the place up pretty accurately, and from what I saw and what I gathered, there was quite enough in prospect to make the game worth playing. And I sat up the whole of the next night trying to think just how I should play it. To think of all that money lying there, and me not able to touch it, made me sad; and to think of it being dumped into a sack and carried off by the police made me sick. That last reflection served me. I saw at once the close connection there was between the police and the money, and I acted accordingly.

"I had been out to the place where fortune favours the fortunate two or three times, and I had dropped ten pounds by way of paying my footing in an old Egyptian game called Pharaoh, which they used to rook the Israelites with on the Red Sea bank——eh?"

"I merely observed that your knowledge of Scriptural history is unique and original," I replied. "Go on."

"There were thirty-five or forty men pretty steadily frequenting the place," continued Mr. Tutt, "and a great deal of money was flying round, so I judged that they brought plenty in with them, even if they didn't all go out staggering under sack loads of winnings. Well, as I said, I turned to the police as being the most likely rake I could find to hook a pocketful of gold and notes out for myself, and I did it this way.

"First of all I pretended business which would keep me a bit late, and arranged to come on to the house instead of driving out together as we usually did. Then I went to the 'tec. and told him that that night would be as good as any other for his raid, and that there would be a full house and plenty of evidence obtainable. But, I insisted, I had got conscientious scruples about being mixed up in it when it came to the point of appearing in Court.

"‘Besides,’ says I, artfully, ‘you can get a lot more out of it if you make it appear you have done it all

off your own bat. You go as me. You're about my build, and we can change things for one night. Take half-a-dozen men down and plant them outside, slip in in my place and get all the evidence you want, and then you can call in your men and bag the principals.'

"He was a mutton-headed jossler, for sure. I should have seen a dozen objections to that straight off; but he didn't. He thought it a jolly good plan, and we



"The police filed off on foot."—*p.* 159.

carried it out completely as far as the preliminaries were concerned, and I took mighty good care that it was arranged to go my way.

"The policemen filed off on foot, and we passed them in a cab half a mile from the house, plodding along through the wet and mud. We had already dressed for our parts up at the hotel, and I would have sworn to the other chap for me anywhere. He

was smart in his way, and he had got me fixed exactly, down to the limp I had cultivated during my stay up North.

“‘Three knocks and a whistle,’ said I, when we got out and dismissed the cab, ‘and in you go. I’ll put the men about all right, and mind you don’t go giving me away. Some of those men in there are business friends, and it might do me harm.’

“He nodded, and the next moment I saw him stand in the gleam of light from the open door and disappear from view. He had about ten minutes to get his evidence together, and much good I hope it did him. In that time I had planted three men about outside, ready to pick up any stragglers, and with the other three of the squad I marched up to the house, gained admittance by the secret signal, and led the way to the Temple of Mammon.

“Not one of the police had the slightest suspicion that they were not being directed by the detective, and for a one-handed coup I reckoned I was about to establish a record. I walked into that show with my stodgy splay-foots backing me up, as nice a looking ’tec. as you could wish to avoid meeting on a dark night when you are coming out of a strange house with your pockets lined with another chap’s property; and we made a fine old stir in that dovecot, I can tell you. There was a full meeting, and about forty men sat up from the tables, where they were deep in bridge and other sorts of games, and I

chuckled to myself when I spotted my understudy flinging his chips round with the rest under the guidance of my swell hotel acquaintance. He jumped a bit when he saw me and his men come in, because it wasn't quite according to the programme.

"‘Now, gent.’s,’ said I, looking at him hard, ‘the game’s up; but if you take it easy you won’t be hit



"Now, gent.'s," said I, "the game's up."—*p.* 161.

very badly. The house is surrounded, so it's no use bolting. I want the principals and servants. The names and addresses of the rest of you will do. Gather up that stuff in case it disappears, Rodway.'

"Rodway was one of the policemen, and with a grin, which had a lot of cupidity in it, he swept up

piles of gold, notes, and packs of cards, and stowed them in a bag, which was standing handy for the purpose.

"The sham Tutt was looking rather aggressive and restless; but I took no notice, and got to work with a note-book and a bit of pencil. It was a silly waste of time; but I went through the performance for the look of the thing. Astonishing what a lot of Smiths and Jones there were there! It is an odd circumstance that the name of nearly everyone caught in nefarious pursuits is either Smith or Jones. It is a sort of family weakness, I reckon.



"'What's the game?'" whispered my understudy, as I came round to him and entered him up as Richard Smith.

"'I dare say you are, and so is everyone else here to-night—all innocent,' said I, loud and sharp. 'Tell that to the Magistrate in the morning. Stand back, and don't let anyone move. Keep the door, Rodway, and club any one who tries to come out.'

"I picked up the bag in passing."
—p. 162.

"I picked up the bag in

passing, and paused on the threshold a moment to watch with glee a stolid policeman motion back, with a painful thrust of his truncheon, his superior officer, done up in the guise of a burglar taking a holiday. Outside I whistled up the men, and they came from behind the bushes, where they had been lying in wait.

“‘Get inside, and lend me a hand,’ said I, shortly. ‘We’ll have all down at the station,’

“They doubled in at a quick trot, and I followed them as far as the hall, where I had noticed a handy key to the gas main, placed there, I suspected, for the express purpose of plunging the establishment in darkness in case of emergency. I turned it, and unhooking the key, bolted with it and my precious bag, and slamming the heavy door behind me, I left a houseload of discontented slops and gamblers to settle things between them, and find out for themselves how nicely brown they had all been done.

“What happened to them officially I never heard, and I didn’t trouble to call and make inquiries. I made five hundred pounds out of it, solid, in gold and notes, to say nothing of several packs of cards and oddments, and I discovered that much while beguiling the time on the Berwick Road by the aid of matches and the sense of touch. For, of course, I didn’t go back to my hotel. I went a quarter of a mile in the opposite direction. My plumage was a bit too conspicuous to be seen about anywhere

for complete safety, and though I had spoiled the Egyptians, I wasn't by any means clear off with the loot. But how I contrived to manage that as well, double the spoil, and then lose the lot in the rottenest way you can imagine, is another story, and as it is past twelve already, I reckon it had better be left for another occasion."

CHAP XI.

THE REWARDS OF ENTERPRISE.

IT was nearly a week before I saw Tutt again, and I had to prompt him severely before I could get him to take up the thread of his discourse, which, from my point of view, he had left in a singularly unsatisfactory state.

Thanks to my efforts, the genial old rascal had obtained a job on a wharf below the pool, where, if the pay was not stupendous, the temptations to lapse into active membership of the profession he once adorned were not overwhelming.

"Oh, yes," said he at last, reminiscently, when I thawed him with whiskey and tempered him with my pouch. "That affair up North where I did the police in the eye, and was only prevented from going off and living on the fat of the land with what I had got out of it because I had got a bit too much out of it, and that bit was the uniform.

"It had served my purpose, but I felt mad enough to kick myself for not seeing that I should want to

shed it in a hurry, and providing myself with some other things: But I hadn't, and it was not much use cussing, for there I was hiding up in a clump of bushes to keep dry and out of observation, and I was doing some hard thinking to find a way out, when there was a sudden crash, and a fellow came sprawling headlong over me from the wood behind, and I had to grab him merely to hold him off, for he was kicking and struggling like a madman.

"‘Let me go,’ he almost sobbed; ‘I haven’t done anything, and it will ruin me if I am mixed up in this.’

"‘Be quiet, you fool,’ said I, promptly sizing up the position. ‘You are all right if you don’t go and bring some inquisitive copper down on us.’

"‘Have you escaped, too?’ he stammered. ‘Thank heaven! I made sure you were a policeman. Come on, and let’s get away from this horrible place. By Jove! that was a near squeak!’

"‘The road will be watched, if you are going back to the town,’ said I; ‘I sha’n’t try it myself.’

"‘But I must,’ he wailed. ‘If I had only left my man on the premises it wouldn’t have mattered; but there is no one, and anything might happen with over two thousand pounds’ worth of stuff quite unguarded.’

"‘Eh?’ said I, growing interested all at once, and feeling a sudden dissatisfaction with what I had already got. Up to then it had seemed a pretty fair

night's work ; but the time to take things is when things are going, you know."

" 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,' " I quoted: "You learn philosophy with other things in that old life of yours, I perceive."

"You do," agreed Tutt, "and when the rosebuds are uncut stones mostly, you don't need to study very long before you start on your gardening."

"The chap told me all this in his fright. He was managing the branch of a big jeweller's in the town, and had got mixed up with that gambling lot in much the same way that I had, with the hope of profit and the certainty of pleasant company and congenial diversion."

" 'Well,' said I, 'supposing the police do nab you, it's only a few pounds' fine for you.' "

" 'No such luck,' said he. 'If a word of it reaches my employers I shall get fired. I have to handle so much money and valuable stuff, and they would calculate on the chance of my going wrong with it at once if they thought I gambled. Besides, they are pious—run a Sunday School, or something of their own in Glasgow, and subscribe to the Anti-Gambling League.' "

" 'That's awkward,' I agreed. 'Anyway, it isn't safe to go back yet awhile. Why not come along with me to the nearest inn and have some supper and go to bed? The chances are all in your favour if you do, because no one knows you are not at home, and

there is no more reason that anyone should pitch on to-night to burgle your place than last night or to-morrow. I wouldn't go back for a lot, and I only stand to pay the fine and the unpleasantness of exposure if I get caught. Besides, it isn't your stuff, and you'll only get sacked if it is stolen while you are away; and you won't get less if you go back and are copped. You weren't fool enough to give your real name and address, were you?'

"'Not much,' said he. 'I was Thomas Jones, of Durham. Only I am not sure that one of those policemen didn't recognise me. He has been on duty at our place, and I have spoken to him now and again of evenings when he has been keeping an eye on the shop. I believe you are right, though; but I don't like leaving all that stuff unprotected. If I had a man I could send in I would trot over to a little place half a mile from here, where I could get a bed. I know the landlord well, and he wouldn't be particular to an hour as to what time I came in if any inquiries were made.'

"'Well,' said I, seeing the very chance I had been looking for at last. 'They only know my clothes, and if they know your face I see how we can work it. I'll go back and keep an eye on your place till the morning for you. Don't be late, though; I've got to go back by the ten train.'

"'I thought you were afraid,' said he.

"'In my clothes, yes,' I admitted. 'I'm in the

Volunteers—an officer, you know—and I was fool enough to wear my cloak. That's what the police will be looking for, but they won't be suspicious of your coat and my face in combination, and if we just exchange before we part it will be easy and safe enough. You'll have to go bareheaded though, for I lost my hat in the scramble.'

" 'Why not let me go back in your coat?' said he, shrewdly, 'if it's as simple as all that?'

" 'A splendid combination with which to attract attention by your dress and secure conviction by your face,' said I. 'Wake up, man, and use your wits. It's not my affair, anyhow; but I have nothing to do, and nowhere particularly that I know of to go to. Certainly I cannot go back to my hotel like this. In your coat I could venture into the town, and once fairly in I could do pretty much as I liked. They'll only watch the road in, and if they didn't recognise my dress, and don't know my face, I could walk up and down past the police-station all night and not be touched.'

" 'It's jolly good of you,' said he, in tones of profound conviction. 'Anyway, this is bally unpleasant, and if you will do it I'll be greatly obliged. I can't offer you money, or anything, I suppose?'

" 'No,' said I, firmly. 'It's not much to do, and in getting a decent bed I'm gaining on it. Besides, I think these small services are always fully rewarded.'

" 'You are a brick,' said he, ripping off his coat:

“‘You’re a chump,’ thought I, making the necessary exchange.

“‘Here’s the key,’ he continued, handing it over. ‘You go in by the door down the lane at the side of the shop. There’s only my caretaker, a deaf old fool of sixty. She won’t hear you or anything short of a cannon. In the morning, if she sees you, you’re a friend of mine from London stopping with me. My name’s Snevell, and you can say I’ve run out to get something. Make yourself at home. I’ll be there by ten at latest.’

“‘Don’t come in that coat,’ said I, as we parted. ‘Borrow something up at the inn, and if you can’t bring mine along in a parcel have it sent off to me at the Station Hotel, Carlisle. I shall be there in a day or two. Until then I’ll have to get you to go on lending me this one.’

“‘Right you are,’ said he. ‘Good night, and good luck, and hearty thanks. You’ve saved my billet, and if ever I can do you a turn I’ll not forget it.’

“‘That’s all right,’ said I. ‘You are doing me a splendid turn. So long, and don’t tell too much up at the inn.’

“‘This, Mr. William Tutt, Esquire,’ says I to myself an hour later, as I stuck the key in the side door and walked into a land flowing over with uncut diamonds and gold thingumies, ‘is what you can call a safe transaction.’ I hadn’t had the least trouble over getting back, and the only person I saw—a wet and

weary-looking slop—stopped me and borrowed a light for his pipe. If he hadn't been in such a raw funk, that chap could have walked home just as easy, and saved himself no end of bother and his employers' money: I wouldn't have left a man like that in charge of a pet rabbit, and he had no sympathy from me for whatever he was to get out of it.

"I found a bottle of whiskey and some clothes, which I fancied more than those I was wearing. There was a bed, too, but I didn't trouble about that. I had other things to see to, and a bigger job than I had expected. That chap had forgotten to leave the key of the safe at home, and it didn't take me long to go through the place and find out that I wasn't going to do much without it. Of course, there was plenty of stuff of sorts, and I had a sort of professional sorrow over leaving it. Up at home, with a stable handy, and a sack, and a melting-pot, I could have made a profitable haul with what was in sight. As it was, it was of no more use to me than the contents of the coal cellar.

"No, all I wanted was in that safe, and when I realised that, I gave that safe all my attention. There are two sorts of safes known to chaps who visit them after business hours—the sort you can't open and don't need to waste your time in trying, and the sort you can. This was one of the last sort; but even they take a good bit of knowledge, and a lot of work before you see what there is for you inside them. I hadn't

any blanks or skeletons with me, and, of course, being without any other necessary tools, this was to be key-work out and out. The nearest thing I could come at was the latchkey, which had been lent me to come in with, but with that, and a handy vice and jeweller's tools that I found behind the shop, I could manage. These things run pretty much to a pattern, and I knew them well enough to find the size. 'Experiment does it,' as the Latiners say.

"I had to burn a flicker of gas, and I was working away with a file when I was startled by a sharp double rapping at the door up in the front shop. I dropped the tool I was handling, and stood there with my mouth open for bluebottles. It was a startler, I can tell you, for I had felt so beastly secure that I hadn't given a thought to anything of this sort.

"My first idea was to skip, but I remembered all the chances against me, and determined to bluff. Anyway, I was safe with the manager backing me up, and I reckoned on having him to do that, even if I didn't get the stones. I slipped the key into my pocket, took an old watch to bits in something of a hurry, and left it lying there for evidence, and then went through the shop in time to answer a second and more impatient knocking.

"'Hello, what do you want?' said I, in as gruff a voice as I could manage.

"'What's up?' came back, and the voice suggested authority done up in blue:

“‘I am,’ says I. ‘What do you want?’

“‘I want to have a look at you,’ was the response, and it suggested to my mind that the desire wasn’t altogether the outcome of affection.

“‘You’re another,’ said I. ‘Come round to the side door and do your eyesight good, if that’s all you want to cure you. You don’t expect me to take down the shutters and open the blooming place just for that, do you?’

“I heard the regulation flip-flap go off round the corner, and though I wasn’t keen I went to meet my visitor by lantern light alone.

“‘Why,’ said I, incautiously, ‘it’s Rodway.’ And it was.

“‘That’s me,’ said he, surlily. ‘But who are you? and what are you doing at this time of night?’

“‘What’s wrong?’ said I, ignoring his questions. ‘Want my cousin for that little gambling frolic, I suppose. I told him you’d spot him. “A sharp, clever man like Rodway,” says I to him, “ain’t to be fooled; and he’s got you set down for a quid, I’ll warrant.”’

“Rodway grinned, the chuckle-headed fool, and I reckoned that I’d shown him how to increase his income in a way he hadn’t thought of for himself.

“‘Oh, that’s all right,’ said he, pleasantly, ‘I saw him, of course, and a good many others, but we don’t tell all we knows by a bit, and there won’t be no bother over that. I just heard a row going on, and saw a light, and I thought I’d find out what it meant.

You ain't mending watches at this time of night, are you ?'

"Just a private job I've got on hand,' said I. 'I didn't feel in a mood for bed, so I put in a spell on it.'

"I thought the fool would be satisfied then, and trot, but I reckon he knew something of what you were saying of just now, and was going to gather his quid while he had the chance, and make more of it.

"'I'd just like to see Mr. Snevell,' he remarked, after we stood for a moment looking at each other. 'Of course, it's all right, but as a matter of form——'

"'And quids,' said I. 'Snevell's upstairs. I don't know whether he'll be inclined to get up and come down for you.'

"'I could run up to him,' he suggested.

"I cussed the fellow for his importunity, but I was afraid to let out at him as I should have liked.

"'Or I could bring the thick 'un down to you,' said I, artfully.

"He shook his head. 'I'm not doubting who you are,' he remarked, pointedly ; 'but if anything went wrong here I should have to stand the racket, and I'm not going out of this place till I've seen Mr. Snevell, and had it from him that it's all right.'

"'The deuce !' thought I. 'Then my little game's done up fine.' At first I was minded to let him go ahead, and turn and bolt for it, but I had no boots on, my bag was upstairs, and I just couldn't make

up my mind to take the bare risk of getting away empty-handed.

“‘Come on, then, for a nuisance,’ said I, shortly. I let him go ahead of me, and called up, not too loud, ‘Snevell, here’s the police wanting you for to-night’s affair.’”

“Rodway chuckled as he plodded up by the light of a match I held behind him, and when we got to the bedroom door I took care to drop it.

“‘He’s asleep, I reckon,’ said I. ‘I’ll light the gas and stir him up. Go in: he won’t mind.’”

“I had got my plan safe by then. Rodway was a small chap, and with luck and pluck I reckoned I could do it. I shoved him gently ahead of me as I spoke, and when I got him fairly over to the bed I gave him a run that shot him fair on to it, and smothered him with the clothes. Oh! he was a lovely specimen of bagged bluebottle, and when I had him upright again, with two blankets and



“I let him go ahead of me.”—p. 175.

a quilt over him, and tied firmly round his middle, I hit him in the stomach for luck, and asked him if his inspector knew he was out. Then I tied him up some more, and put him to bed nice and snug. Locking the door and taking the key, I went back to my work.

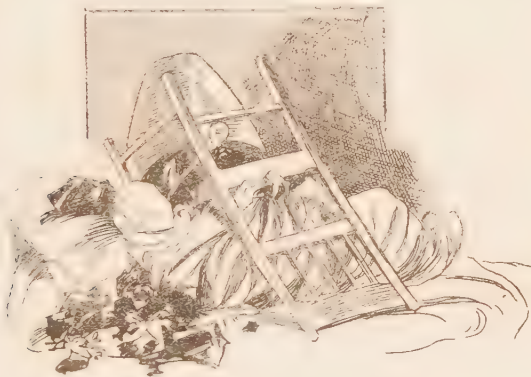


"Smothered him with the clothes."—p. 175.

"My, how I did work! That key powdered up like brick-dust under the file, and in half-an-hour I had the safe door open and the contents in my possession. I doubled up the rest of the detective's uniform that I had shed upstairs for a lark with Rodway's helmet, and stowed them inside it, and fastened the safe again.

"'Exchange is no robbery,' says I to myself, for I was a pleasant, merry sort of fellow in those days, and I liked a joke when it wasn't too personal.

Then I took a look at the sleeping beauty. He seemed contented and peaceful enough, so I put the coal-scuttle and a few chairs and things over him to keep him warm, dressed myself up a treat in the best of Snevell's things I could find, packed the gold and stones into a stronger and handier bag, and went for a walk.



"I put the coal-scuttle over him."—*p.* 177.

"It was a nice long walk that I reckoned on—up as far as London, though I was willing to do some of it in a train. That's where I made a mistake. I began too soon, anyway ; but I had an exciting time, and I was dead tired, and when I found myself near a big junction in another town so close to the one I had left that only a river marked where one left off and the other began, I determined to cut my walk short and travel by train. By the time-tables I could

see that there was a choice of two trains, and I bought tickets in such a beastly reckless way that I entitled myself to travel to London, or the west, or alight at a local station twenty miles down the London line.

"I chose the train going south, got out at the local station, and bought more tickets, one of which carried me to a big junction in Yorkshire. By the time I got there I was pretty well done up, but with a nip of brandy and a sandwich I kept myself awake. I was making a cross run for Leeds, where I could find assistance and make a few necessary changes in my clothes. It is sinful to sneak another man's coat and trousers and hat and things, but it is positively foolish to go on wearing them when you are wanting to be unobserved, and they are being telegraphed all over the kingdom.

"Among other things that I borrowed from the jeweller's manager up north was a razor, and a rough and ready dry shave in the train coming down left me pretty easy about my face being anything like adequately described.

"Well, I studied a railway plan in the carriage, and left the train below Northallerton, where I found I could get across and pick up a train that would give me a straight run out of my journey, of which I was pretty well sick and tired. It was just on three then, and I seemed to have been messing about in trains and on platforms for a week.

"I got a spare meal in the town, and left it with a three-mile tramp in view. What happened after that I never had any clear idea, but they explained to me at the Cottage Hospital two hours later, when they put me a bit into shape to grasp things, that I had been shot into the road by a reckless fool on a runaway bicycle half-way down a steep hill. He, the fool, was occupying the next bed to mine, and so mightily anxious as to whether he was to continue existing with a right leg of meat and muscle or a peg substitute, that I hadn't the heart to worry him with my views about his intellect.

"I was black and blue and cut all over, and my own intellect was concussed to such an extent that I clean forgot all about my bag, and found, when I did remember it, that no one had ever had any knowledge of it. It wasn't brought in with me, and I never set eyes on it or its contents again. I could never properly inquire, of course, and when you get a hit in the face like that you just have to fill it in your pipe and smoke it.

"Now, that's what I am maintaining. Both those jobs I did in a way that I can't help feeling a bit proud over. I put capital in 'em, and a lot of people to a lot of pain and inconvenience, and when it was all done and got I was knocked out by a side show, and all my work and risk brought me a black eye, and a three months' limp, net."

CHAP. XII.

ACCOMPLICE AFTER THE FACT.

“**Y**OU have had good hauls and bad hauls,” I insinuated. “According to what you have told me, you have made a haul out of next to nothing, and you have made nothing out of a haul. It seems to me that there is a shade more of speculation in burglary than there is on the turf.”

“Why, and for the matter of that, so there is,” agreed Mr. Tutt emphatically. “It is the unexpected what happens, and it ain’t every man who goes out after a pocketful of property who gets five years: nor is it every man who goes with the fear, if not expectation, of earning five years, who comes back with a bag of stuff for the fences and melting-pot. ‘Buy meat, buy bones,’ you know’s the saying, and burglary is an honest stake—quids or quods, and you and your luck in the balance for what you get out of it. I’ll give you an instance.”

“Do,” said I. “These instances are entertaining

and profitable, if not to the mind, to my banking account."

"I had been—er—living in retirement for a month or two," began Mr. Tutt, with a wry smile at the recollection of many odd months of his career spent in that way. "I had gone there for next to nothing, and as I made nothing there, and had nothing when I went, I wasn't in a very flourishing condition when I started afresh to earn my living.

"I was living up St. Pancras way, for economy and other things, on a quid or two I managed to raise in advance from a gent. who obliged 'sure' ones like myself on terms beyond the legal rate of interest. There was a snug little jeweller's there which I thought was worth a bit of time and attention, or I would have preferred to be on the other side of the water, because the neighbourhood was close and unhealthy, speaking in a general way. I was too well-known by the boys in blue, and that is a drawback for gents who aren't fond of society.

"But I hadn't got a job, and I had got a mouth which wanted steady work, job or none, and I couldn't afford to be over nice in picking and choosing. It was winter time, and a lot of snow about with it, and well I remember the hours I spent up on a sloping roof staring down into the back parlour of this shop, where a careless chap was fairly dazzling me with cases and cases of rings and chains and bracelets. I thought he was taking stock, or some-

thing like that, and I cursed him, or my luck, for letting him do it just the night when I wanted to be taking a little stock on my own account.

"It was all right to get a sort of private view of what I was going to have the pick of; but that wasn't much compensation for lying there till I was half frozen. Any other night the chap would have been in bed and asleep hours ago. To make it worse, I had come early so as to get a good perch, and I heard it strike all the way from ten to one before the light went out, and the fellow went off to dream of his gold stuff. I thought he was going to sit there pawing it over all night, he seemed so precious fond of it.

"I tell you what, mister! If one of those inventor chaps would contrive an instrument to show what a man is thinking about we could save ourselves a deal."

"We could," I agreed. "Though in the hands of the police such an invention might have been awkward to you before your regenerate state was attained."

"We wouldn't get into their hands," he retorted shrewdly. "We'd know what we were chancing it for anyhow, and that's more than I did that night, when I lay for hours frozen to the tiles in a bed of snow, with snow coming down and trying to interest me in a game of Babes in the Wood.

"I was wet enough and cold enough when the signal for release did come, but I had enough feeling left

to worm my way across the roof and slip aside the catch of a window: It was risky, but I was too cold and wretched to remain outside any longer, and I



"When I lay for hours frozen to the tiles."—*p.* 182.

did the rest of my waiting in the shelter and comparative warmth of the room I had entered. I gave the proprietor something like an hour to get to bed in case he should be smitten with a sudden desire to go back and have one more look at his stock,

and then, as all seemed secure and quiet, I determined to get to work.

"I was clumsy that night. Being so thoroughly chilled, I suppose, I hadn't proper command over myself, neither my legs nor my brain acting quite as they did ordinarily. I scooped the lock of the door in turning the catch to begin with, and, as if I were annoyed at not bringing myself on the first step to quod by that means, I pitched headlong down a short and unexpected flight of stairs which broke up the landing.

"It was a racket. I couldn't hope that I should go undetected then, and you can judge my surprise when a door ahead of me opened, and a nervous voice came out.

"‘You clumsy fool,’ it quavered, ‘You’ll go and muddle it. What are you doing up here? The stuff is all where I said I’d put it. Did you get in unobserved?’

"‘Yes, guv’nor,’ said I, picking myself up gingerly and rubbing my head, which had several tender spots on it. ‘And I’ll go out unobserved too, if you’ll shut your eyes a minute and not see me.’

"‘It’s more than you deserve,’ he snarled viciously, ‘You’re a pretty fine burglar, you are. You must make a fine income in a twelvemonth, if you do it as clever as this, you must.’

"‘I’m not complaining, though I could do with a bit more fat,’ said I, beginning to think that the chap

was off his rocker, or drunk, or something, and feeling it best to humour him whichever way it was.

“‘Well, try,’ he snapped. ‘It’s all in the cupboard, and the key’s on the mantel, behind the clock. Mind how you get away, and don’t take anything else with you. Good-night.’

“‘Sir,’ said I, ‘you’re a toff,’ and I meant it.

“That was the first time that I had been invited to help myself in such a large-hearted, generous way, and I thought the man must be President of some Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Burglars, at least. All the same, I kept my wits about me, because such dead-easy jobs ain’t natural, and I knew that there was something rotten somewhere.

“There was; but it wasn’t in the stuff, seemingly. I found it all just where I had been told it would be; and it looked good, and felt good, and smelt good. Cases on cases there were, just as I had seen the owner pawing over and gloating on. Oh! it was a suck in!

“I shelled the things, of course. The cases were very pretty in their black velvet lining, but they bulked out too much, and there was no profit in them anyway. And I just crammed my pockets as full as they would hold, and had to borrow a bag then to get everything away. I didn’t leave immediately, since the invitation had been so hearty, but went into the kitchen and found a bottle of beer and some cold pie. I was tucking in when I heard a step stealing along the

hall, and I turned out the flicker of gas I had got burning just to find the way to my mouth with, and made ready for a quick bolt.

"From behind the scullery door, where I hid, I could see into the shop-parlour, and I guessed at once that the red-headed, foxy chap in night-shirt and breeches, who was standing there with a candle in his hand, was the boss. For some reason or other I kept still and watched.

"He muttered something savage to himself when he saw the pile of cases, and commenced gathering them up. He made a fire of the lot in the grate, and kept piling them on until they were all burned to red ash. Next he got down a box, and took out a jemmy that made my mouth water, it was such a splendid tool. I could'nt go and look, but from what I heard, and what I knew of the subject, I guessed that he was opening his safe without a key. And, of course, it was no business of mine; nor was it my affair that he smashed a pane in the French windows of the shop-parlour, unfastened them, and deliberately left them open—though I would have liked to know what it all meant really, and what, by any chance, he had in the safe that I had left severely alone.

"On the face of it, it looked as though a burglary had been required, which is not a usual thing for respectable tradesmen to hanker after, and seemingly a clumsy and obvious pattern one was necessary.

But curiosity in some cases is worse than a crime, and I reckoned that I had best be satisfied with what I had seen, and skip along with my little lot before anything else developed. I was going to act on that principle, and slip out by the French windows and get off home, when the chap who owned the place at last went back to his bedroom and left me undisturbed down below, when another interruption came along.

"I didn't hear him come up owing to the thick carpet



"A burly, rough fellow came into the room."—*p.* 188.

of snow ; but I caught the sound of a step on the ledge of the open window, and dodged back behind the door in time to avoid being seen. A burly, rough-looking fellow came cautiously into the room, and threw the gleam of a small lantern round.

“ ‘S’elp me never, if this ain’t crib-cracking made easy and pleasant!’ I heard him mutter.

“I chuckled a bit to myself, for it suggested a sort of burglars’ soiree, and I began to understand a bit of what was going on. Evidently it wasn’t according to programme, for that fellow did nothing but grumble, and when he opened the cupboard I had already looted and found nothing there, he sat down and swore steadily for five minutes solid. Then he did a hunt round, and after inspecting the broken safe, he went straight for the stairs, and the next minute I heard him pounding on a door above. I stole across to the foot of the stairs and listened.

“ ‘Look ’ere, guv’ner, what’s the game?’ I heard him say. ‘You asks me, as a favour, to call round and do a bit of burglarin’ for you, and I gives up a night’s rest and wastes my time, and there ain’t so much as a thimble that’s worth sneaking. Where’s all them bloomin’ jools and bricelets what you wanted stole? I don’t like this sort of ’anky, and so I tells you strite. I’m a plain man, I am ; and when I ses a thing I does it. Eh—I sharn’t ’ush. I didn’t ask to come and crack your rotten show, did I? You ses to me—oh it ’as, ’as it? Well, that ain’t no forlt

of mine. I came round by appointment to crack this 'ere show, and if you 'ave gone and let it be cracked by someone else, why, in course, you'll 'ave to pay for wisting my time. Time's precious, and if I ain't agoin' to get the bricelets and the rings arter all, I must 'ave cash.'

"There were subdued sounds of nervous explanation and mild expostulation from above, and I chuckled to myself. Of course, I could see the story all the way through then. That chap had arranged to have a burglary. Why? Oh, plenty of reasons. There are a lot of jobs of that sort going among small tradespeople. A burglary insurance is handier, and less risky to claim on, than a fire ; and a pal of mine once got a couple of years for burgling a safe by arrangement that hadn't got enough in it to pay for the cost of opening. It had been cleared out by a defaulting manager, and we knew that the three thousand pounds that was put down to my pal's account had gone on the Stock Exchange weeks before he entered the building.

"Of course, I couldn't say then for a certainty precisely what the game was ; but I reckoned that the things I had got were to include other and more valuable ones that I hadn't, or else the fellow who had planned the burglary was standing in with the man who did the job, and taking two-thirds of the full value by a process of buying back, after the insurance claim, which he would make, had been settled.

"Anyway, I had got the stuff, and that was good enough for me, and when I heard sounds above which suggested they were coming down to make investigations, I cleared off by the back way to the street, and got home without any inconvenient encounters,

"The next day I went over to the Borough with a sample of my wares to a man who ran a handy pawnshop over there. He's doing ten years now, poor chap, through handling some diamonds to oblige an old customer who got them mixed up with his luggage at Charing Cross Station, and was afraid to keep them about him in case he should lose them. He looked at me a bit odd, I thought, after he had examined the stuff, and his manner made me feel uncomfortable.

"‘Got much of this?’ he asked:

"‘A fair bagful,’ said I, with a grin.

"‘Poor chap!’ says he. ‘Well, I hope you got the bag too. That, maybe, will be the most valuable bit of the scoop.’

"‘Rats!’ says I. ‘It’s good sound stuff, ain’t it?’

"‘No,’ said he, shortly. ‘I thought you knew your business. You’re coming down, Tutt, my boy, to go and sneak a pedlar’s outfit from a common lodging-house, and then try and work it off on me. It ain’t complimentary, and it ain’t honest. If you thought, because I know you so well, I should buy on trust, it’s playing it low down; and if you try that game with me I’ll make it warm for you. Where did you

get it? Come on, now, let's have a straight tale. I deal fairly with my customers, and I expect them to do ditto with me.'

"I didn't give him the yarn in full, but I let him understand that I had put in a fair night's work to get that stuff, and all that was rotten in it was the dirty, low-down action of the red-headed jeweller. I felt limp, I can tell you. I had reckoned on a new outfit and six months' clear independence, instead of which I had got a haul of snyde jewellery which was worth nothing to me, and only from three to ten bob an article over a counter.

"The fence wasn't quite satisfied, I could see; but I didn't mind about that. I had other things to think of. Then I could understand everything, and although I had stolen a march on another chap, the grievance was in the family so to speak. The lay was to have him steal all that shoddy fake stuff, and to claim for the real, which either didn't exist or else had been carefully put out of the way.

"I raised a quid or two on loan, and got back to my lodgings to do some hard thinking. One thing, I didn't have to trouble about disposing of the remainder of my loot. It had been sneaked during my absence. Nobody knew anything about it, though it was an odd circumstance that my landlady was wearing a couple of new rings when she came up to answer my questions; and her old man wore a watch-chain which was several sizes too big for his means, if it was real.

"I got most of my information from the papers, which gave a full and fanciful report of a big robbery in the neighbourhood. Over a thousand pounds' worth of stuff had been stolen, it said, and from the evidence the detectives believed it to be the carefully-organised work of a gang of burglars who infested the northern suburbs. Fortunately, the victim was fully insured against his loss; but it was to be hoped, for the sake of less prudent citizens, that the police would make a strong effort to capture the miscreants.

"There was half a column of it, giving details and slanging the police, and I got all the satisfaction that was possible out of the last, though I should have enjoyed the affair more if that red-headed fellow hadn't been such a crafty scoundrel. I hadn't done with him, for I felt mad enough about it, when I thought of the hours I had frozen up on his roof, to give him away to the insurance people if I could have done so. But, of course, I couldn't do anything of the sort. Nobody but the insurance people would have believed me, and I stood to get fixed in any case.

"I didn't give up altogether. Chaps who do that sort of thing are generally rank cowards, and this one must be, or why did he engage a burglar at all. He could have just as well hidden those rubbishy trinkets, and pretended the whole thing, except that he wanted the mental and moral support of an actual burglar; though I dare swear he didn't care a hang

about the risks we poor chaps run, or think anything of the mean, dirty trick he was playing on us as well as on the Company.

"I gambled on that anyhow, and made the second slip. At first I thought it was going my way. He went very white and foolish-looking when I entered the shop just as he was closing up, and whispered that I'd come about last night's affair. He told me to come into the shop-parlour and wait a minute while he finished his job, and I rubbed my hands pleasantly, and reckoned that maybe it wasn't going to be such a bad deal after all. I was just calculating on how much I'd strike him for, when he came in.

"‘Now, my man,’ said he, briskly, and in a beastly casual manner, ‘what is it you want?’

"‘Well, that depends,’ says I, cheerfully. ‘Maybe there was a little mistake after all, and we can settle this thing pleasantly between ourselves without going to law over it.’

"‘Compounding a felony,’ said he, shortly. ‘Mind you are not bound to tell me anything ; but if you do, I shall not be a party to that. In the first place, who and what are you?’

"I didn't like this at all. Ginger for pluck, they say ; but that wasn't any consolation to me if this chap was going to show fight.

"‘Well, let's call it an accessory after the fact,’ said I. ‘I happen to be in possession of certain information concerning the nature of the stuff that you had stolen,

and it doesn't quite square with the reported description. How I got it doesn't matter : but what you are prepared to do about it does.'

"'Do about it?' he queried, slowly, as though the idea were something new and novel. 'How do you mean, do about it?'

"'Why,' said I, 'it's plain enough. All that time and trouble over the things that were actually taken last night shows that they were worth more than they appear to be in themselves. These insurance people will be hunting them up possibly. What are you going to give me to keep them safe out of sight?'

"'This,' said he. And before I knew what was on,



he had got up the fire-shovel, and was laying into me good and hard. I got the first smack behind the ear, and saw more jewels than all his trading stock contained, and the next came square on my nose.

"I fought him off, and held him there while I asked him what

sort of game he was playing. He said he was pounding a felon, which was as near as he could allow himself to go towards compounding a felony ; and, as I was a positive and unpleasant fact, he would be the accessory after me. He didn't want to be rough with me, he explained ; there was a clear way into the street ; but so long as I remained in sight he held it a positive duty to spank me with his shovel.

"Well, I'm not often done," concluded Mr. Tutt, with a gloomy smile ; "but I was on that occasion. I got one or two fair smacks at him, and bent up his features a bit, but I couldn't stand against that fire-shovel for long, and it ended by my being fairly sloshed through the shop and out into the roadway."

"That was an unprofitable deal," said I, without sympathy. "Did it end at that?"

"Pretty well," replied Tutt. "During the scrimmage a watch got knocked into my pocket somehow, and I sold it to the fence over in the Borough for a fiver ; but taking it by and large I don't reckon I made anything on the job, and if I hadn't got three years for something else first, and then permanently convinced of the error of my ways, I should have gone round there again after business hours, and selected a few articles with an acid bottle to square up my account.

CHAP. XIII.

HONOUR AMONG THIEVES.

“**Y**OU have had,” said I, thoughtfully, a long and varied experience, and you, if anyone, should be able to say definitely and determinedly. Now what is this ‘honour among thieves’ which is referred to so frequently in the book of social proverbs.

“Piffle,” replied Mr. Tutt, briefly and emphatically. “It exists in the imagination of story-writers only; or if it don’t I have never met it, and I never knew any one who had. Look at it yourself. The lawyer, the parson, and the doctor, don’t they all take their bit out of their friends if they get a chance? Of course they do, and so do we. What do you think was the worst job I ever did?”

“Couldn’t say,” said I.

“Why, robbed a chap who had robbed three of his pals who had cleared out a ‘fence’ and put all the stuff in the keep of one of them—or he thought he had, which is the same thing. It was the smartest

thing I ever heard of, though I did it myself; and though these sort of ways don't give me any pleasure now to think of, I used to chuckle a bit to think how I fetched that off, and cuss when I remembered all I got out of it."

"Let me share the chuckle with you," said I. "I am still unregenerate, you know; and besides, since it confounded the wicked and spoiled the thievish, it is a moral story, and may serve to help the morally weak and faltering."

"It might serve to get me shot or knocked on the head and dropped into the river," quoth my shady companion, "only those who would be interested are not of the reading sort, and, anyway, it is a matter of twelve years since it happened, so those who aren't doing time are all dead by this time most likely."

Mr. Tutt refilled his pipe and glass, by which homely means I kept his memory green and his tongue well lubricated, and then he settled himself comfortably in his chair, and proceeded to enlighten me concerning the manner in which, at a pinch, dog will not disdain to eat dog, thief to rob thieves.

"I was down on my luck at the time," said my protégé. I was hungry and cold and wet. I had had nothing to eat since morning, and nothing to drink—which was worse—all that week, and altogether I was in a vile mood—at war with myself and the world at large. I had left London to—er—look for work, and in something of a hurry. The second day I was

penniless, and being neither able to beg, borrow, nor steal, I tramped and starved, and fetched up for the night under a strawstack. There I sat while the shadows deepened around, and then, growing tired of cussing my luck, always an unsatisfactory pursuit, I scooped myself a shelter well into the heart of the stack, and lay down.

"I had been there about an hour, I should reckon, when I heard a trap being driven slowly along the road towards me. It stopped right opposite, and a chap tied up snug in a big ulster clambered down.

"'I'll cut across here, Wal,' I heard him say, 'and get a bed at the Bull. Pick me up there the day after to-morrow, and if all goes well we'll shift it that night and get it down the river. Bob has got the smack, and will be round by dark.'

"I didn't hear what the man in the cart said; but just then he struck a match, and I got a fine view of him: I was sure I had seen him before, but I couldn't place him exactly, and, while I was wondering who he could be, the man on foot jumped across a gate just behind me, and the cart drove on.

"I got an hour or two of sleep, such as it was, but I did not want anyone to call me early the next morning, and by daybreak I had had enough of that, and took to the road again.

"It was a mile or two outside Romford where I had stayed, and I turned before getting to the town and struck off towards the river. I must have

looked a pretty fair sample of a tramp ; but I wasn't so much concerned about my looks as my appetite just then, and I was doing a bit of thinking towards a likely plan for getting a breakfast when a trap came bowling along behind me, and very nearly put me beyond the need of troubling about that sort of thing ever after.

"It was my luck done up saucy in a spanking little turnout, only I didn't recognise it at first. In fact, I could only see a criminal selfishness on the part of the driver in muffling himself up in rugs and waterproofs, and leaving chance footgoers to look after themselves, and I expressed my views pretty freely as I dodged the wheels.

"The man in the trap reined up and looked hard at me, and when I had exhausted my store of forcible English he remarked, 'You are early astir, my friend. Your bed wasn't to your liking, probably? However, I mustn't stand here any longer or my nag will be taking cold. You seem down on your luck, and if you care to do a bit of work for me I can probably set you up again. You look miserable enough to require the job, and I should hope you are discreet enough to do it with no further interest than concerns the payment. In short, I want a man to help me with a risky operation, to hold his tongue about it, and to go his way and leave me to go mine when it is finished. Is it a bargain?'

"'Sealed and signed,' said I. 'I'm on, like a cat to a cook.'

"I got into the trap and accepted a supply of the wrappings, and in silence we continued the journey. We turned off to the right soon after, and drew up at a little roadside pub. The other chap got down, and motioning me to follow him, we left the trap to the care of the stableman and entered the house, where a meal was set for us in a private room.

"He was a tall, thin, muscular-looking chap, and no stranger. It was the very man I had seen in the trap the night before, and now I could get a square view of him, I placed him at once. It was 'Flash Walter,' the king of thieves, a chap who only handled first-class jobs, and who did that mostly at second-hand, planning them out and getting them ready, and allowing others to do the risky part of the work for the smaller part of the profits.

"Fortunately he didn't know me. I always worked single-handed, and I had brains enough to find my own 'crib' and keep the contents to myself when I had cracked it. I didn't let on, but pretended to be the tramp down on his luck he had evidently taken me for. I couldn't help chuckling to myself, though; and I almost laughed out in his face when he got what he thought was a likely and satisfactory lie and spun it out for me.

"He was a bit vague, but I gathered that he wanted me to believe that he had got a bit of smuggled stuff hidden down by the river which he wanted me to remove. He made it 'smuggled' so as to account

for the secrecy and the need of working at night, or I reckon he'd have been a merchant prince or a farmer or any other darn thing that came handy.

“‘So,’ said he, after explaining as much as he thought necessary—which wasn’t much—‘if you care for the job say so, and you shall not be badly paid for your share of the work. If not, it is not too late to back out.’

“‘Not me,’ said I. ‘The job’s good enough for me, and I’m your man when you’re ready.’

“‘That’s the style,’ said he, heartily. ‘We’ll drive on to Tilbury now and pick you up something decent to wear, and a few tools we shall require, and then work back towards Purfleet, where the stuff is lying. To-night, if the weather is thick enough—and I think it will be out there on the marshes—we can manage the business comfortably, and by this time to-morrow nobody will be the poorer and we shall be the richer by a good many pounds.’

“At the close of the day, which had been one of intermittent rain storms, a thick, white mist enveloped the land like a blanket, muffling it up in its dense white folds, and proving an able auxiliary to the work in hand. Shortly before nine we left Tilbury behind us, and trusting more to the instinct of our horse than any intelligent directions we were able to give, drove off in the direction of Purfleet. We made leisurely progress, partly owing to the state of the road and the impossibility of seeing beyond the horse’s

head, and partly because my employer was in no hurry to reach his destination.

"We had been driving close on two hours along the desolate and deserted road, when the horse suddenly drew up of his own accord before a wretched-looking little four-roomed cottage standing back from the wayside. Jumping down with alacrity, the driver undid a gate and led the way to the back of the ken. Then, motioning me to alight, he stabled the horse for the time being under a lean-to shed, and, possessing himself of some tools and a lantern, he walked briskly across the plot of ground which evidently belonged to the house, climbed through a hedge at the bottom, and pursued the even tenor of his way across a dreary waste of marsh-land, his tall figure bobbing up and down over the ridges and rills, with me a bad second stumbling heavily after him.

"Presently the steady lap, lap, lap, of the incoming tide could be heard in front of us, and then he drew up and waited for me to join him.

"'There it is,' he said, pointing to what seemed to be a dense black cloud rising in front of us through the white mists. 'There is about three feet of water up her sides by this time, and we shall have to wade it. Keep behind me, and not a sound until we are on board and below. Mind how you come.'

"It wasn't any picnic wading through that water over a slippery bottom, and I was glad enough when

I found myself on the slanting deck, and diving down into an inky cavern that yawned before us.

"Once safely down and away from observation, my companion lit the lantern, and threw the cheering beams around the contracted and poky little cabin, where, under a heap of old rubbish, we found the 'smuggled' goods. Five heavy rough-wood cases there were, and these with infinite toil and trouble we got to shore, and then across those tedious marshes to the trap, each case requiring a separate journey, for it was as much as we could do to lift one between us.

"The light was breaking across the river as we toiled painfully up with the last load, and stowed it with the others under some old matting in the shed.

"Smuggling! I did chuckle to think of going smuggling in a derelict lighter with the stuff packed up in old sugar boxes, though when I came to examine them I found the stuff, whatever it was, had been better secured than I thought. But he must have thought I was fresh.

"‘A tough night's work that, my friend,’ said my companion, ‘and finished none too soon. However, we have done it, and done it well, too, I flatter myself. I will put you on your road, and then—the best of friends must part, you know.’

"‘Yes,’ said I slyly. ‘Smuggled goods weigh heavy. It ain't ostrich feathers, is it?’

"‘Never mind that,’ said he shortly. ‘Here is payment for your trouble, and there are a couple of

sovereigns to take you back to London, or wherever you may wish to go: and now you take my tip and forget everything.'

"I touched my hat and took the tip—as far as the coin was concerned it wasn't bad payment either—twenty pounds in notes and two in coin—for a stiff night's work—but I thought there ought to be more than that in it for Mr. William Tutt, if that much was enough for a mere tramp.

"I didn't go to London; I went a hundred yards along the road instead, jumped the hedge and stole back and hid myself where I could get a clear view of the cottage.

"I had plenty of time to do all the thinking I required, and, although, of course, I was very well able to put two and two together, I knew 'Flash Walter's' reputation, and I had a shrewd idea concerning the nature of that smuggled cargo. The arrangement I heard made was for a smack to come down and pick up the stuff on the night following. Quite so; only, when the smack and the other parties arrived 'Flash Walter' and the stuff would be missing. Well, they would, but not in company if I could help it.

"I crept up to the cottage, and took a cautious peep through the window. My late employer was building a fire in the tumble-down grate, and I gathered from that and other signs that he wouldn't be likely to turn out yet awhile. Quite likely he would lie low

all day, load up at dusk, cart the stuff back to London, and have it all disposed of and himself out of the way by the time the others were ready to start work.

"At first I thought of sealing him up in his cage; but it was such a rickety, ramshackle old show, that an energetic man could not be kept prisoner there for more than half an hour. With a kitchen poker a mere boy could have battered his way out. So, abandoning that idea, I set to work to remove the cases; but here again I was done; I couldn't drag, let alone lift them, and the noise I should have to make would inevitably bring my late companion on the scene.

"When in doubt, play trumps! There was a chap living close handy who owed me a good turn. He pretended to be a second-hand clothes dealer, and he was, with intervals for the practice of another profession. I went up and had the luck to find him at home, and ready for a fiver to lend me a hand. He had a stiff little cob and a cart which he used in his business, and we paid another visit to that cottage—I in the guise of a policeman—within a couple of hours.

"Fortunately our victim's pistol was not fully charged. I missed the only bullet it contained by a finger's width, and Job lost a couple of teeth in stopping the revolver itself, and then we got our quarry down, and trussed him up like a fowl.

"My word, how he did swear. Job is pretty tough, but he fairly shuddered, and I had to tell our prisoner to shut up and save his prayers for the magistrates in the morning.



"Then we got our quarry down."—*p.* 205:

"We loaded up the cases into Job's cart, and then we harnessed the other conveyance, and loaded that up with its rightful owner. I told Job to drive ten miles out to anywhere, and get rid of his passenger by dropping him into the nearest ditch, bring the pony and trap back to the cottage and leave it there. I was to go back to the shop in Purfleet with the stuff, and wait for him."

"Well," said I, as Mr. Tutt paused as though he

had a sudden reluctance to continue his interesting narrative of scoundrelism.

"Well, I didn't exactly go back to the shop," he resumed with a grimace that may have had a moral origin. "It was a very soft, bright, pleasant sort of morning, and I got thinking about things in general and nothing much in particular, and forgot all about where I was driving, and when I came to remember myself I was miles off from Purfleet, and getting in towards Barking."

"That was very singular," said I gravely.

"It was a bit odd," agreed Tutt, with a cheerful impudence. "And what made it all the more queer was that I knew a chap who kept a pub. down there. If it had been anywhere close now I should have been fairly up a tree, for, what with the distance and the weight, the horse was getting about played out, and it wouldn't have been possible to drive him back.

"As it was, of course, it was easy and natural. I just drove round to the back, called out the landlord and engaged a room, and had the boxes taken up to it. Then I had something to eat while the nag was feeding, and drove quietly back to Job.

"He had done his part well enough; but he was a bit short, because I had changed my plans, and he stood out for a share of the boxes. If I didn't agree, he said, he should hunt up 'Flash Walter' and blow on me. He knew of the whole game from one of the chaps who was coming down on the smack, being a

pal of his, and this alteration would interest a lot of men. In his temper he let it all out to me, and told me a good deal more than I knew about it myself.

"It turned out that 'Flash Walter's' gang had had a run of luck with two big places out at Epping, and had lodged the stuff with a 'fence' at Whitechapel. Now there was half-a-dozen of them in it, not including the 'fence,' and 'Flash Walter' thought there were too many altogether to share up with. So he and big Brown, the man I had seen him with that night on the road, and another, had got the stuff away by breaking in and robbing the 'fence,' who was holding it. They had got it on board a lighter somehow, and run it down the river on to the mud, where I had helped to move it from.

"But even three was too many for 'Flash Walter,' and while the other poor chaps were carrying out the plan they had made about it, the crafty villain picked up a perfect stranger for a couple of tenners to help him to get the whole lot for himself. It was a pretty tidy haul too, most of it being silver plate, with a few odds and ends of stones and jewellery. Job said they reckoned it was worth five thousand to them, and that meant twenty at least in the open market."

"Phew," I whistled. "That was a pretty fair lift up for you. I wonder you didn't do something useful with it, and get out of a calling which, you know, is really not quite respectable."

"As for that," said Tutt, rising and shaking the ashes out of his pipe, "I had that very purpose in view, and I sprung another fiver, and promised Job a fair division just to try and get away from him, and go back and see about it. But Job was artful, and after fooling about his place a day and a half—for he wouldn't leave me a minute by myself, he was that fond of me all of a sudden—I offered him a fifth share (one case) for himself.

"He grumbled a bit, but he took the offer when he saw I meant it to be that or nothing, and we drove over to Barking and got the cases.

"Coming back we were stopped on the road by a bluebottle. I don't think he meant anything special, but they were always suspicious of Job, and, instead of bluffing, the silly fool tried to drive off. Of course, that did the trick. The policeman got a pal to his assistance, and after inviting Job to open any of the boxes and show that they did, as he stated, contain old clothes—which of course we couldn't do—they ran the whole outfit up to the station.

"There the cases were broken open one after the other, and they all contained the same."

"That was awkward," said I; "and what did you get?"

"A bit of relief at the moment, and the spike for months after," growled Tutt. "The cases contained bricks—just common yellow bricks—and I had spent hours and worked like a navvy, and given Job a clear

ten quid just to get a few hundred bricks that a jobbing bricklayer wouldn't have troubled to sneak. Oh, it was maddening. Honour among thieves, eh! Not much, there ain't.



"They looked a fine pack of fools."—*p.* 210.

"Of course he pitched into the police, and they looked a fine pack of fools standing there in the middle of the stuff that had come out of the cases. And Job laid it on so hot that they stored the bricks back into the cases, and chucked them and us out on to the pavement.

"I put it down to the landlord at Barking, and Job put it on to me. But when I came to size things up I could see that we had all been pretty nicely sold, 'Flash Walter' and his pals as well. I reckon that 'fence' did it, either because he suspected the game of the others, or else, as is more likely, to

get the lot for himself. Anyway I don't believe anything more valuable than bricks came away from London, and I had worked like a navvy, and spent a lot of time and good money to be the one to discover it. Things like that help you to grow honest and develop a conscience, perhaps, as I have ; but——"

"Tutt," said I gravely, "I would be very careful of that conscience of mine if I were you. It is young yet and very tender, and I wouldn't submit it to any great strain. It might give way suddenly."

And I believe it would.

CHAP. XIV.

A FARCICAL FELONY.

“**V**ERY good,” said I, approvingly. “Do you know any more?”

Tutt grew reflective.

“Plenty,” he said at length; “but they are a bit after the pattern of those you have already had. There ain’t so much difference between jobs when you come to think of it; but do you remember the X—— Bank crash?”

I did not hardly; but to save time and simplify things, I remembered it with a nod.

“Well, it is a better story than ever came out in the papers,” said Tutt.

He outlined it for my edification, and from rough notes and casual recollections I pieced together the following that is good enough for a story, though it may not be sound and adequate as fact.

Perhaps because of its nature, Tutt did not represent it directly as a personal experience; but in the light of what he had already told me, I was able to

form a fairly accurate guess concerning the identity of the chief actor in it.

"It was an hour past midnight when two men stood outside the strong-room and glared at each other.



"Describing small circles round the head of his companion."—*p.* 213.

"One was stout, elderly, and under other circumstances, doubtless, dignified. Just then he appeared disconcertingly nervous and apprehensive, despite the weapon in his extended hand with which he was describing small circles round the head of his companion.

"The other man was low-class. His appearance somehow suggested public-houses—a succession of them; his bearing had nothing of dignity about it

then or at any time; and his accent betrayed the Cockney, even as his dark lantern and jemmy conveyed a suggestive hint as to his ordinary calling, or at least the means by which he sought to supplement his income.

“‘Well, guv’nor, if it comes to that, what was you a-doing ’ere?’ he repeated, wincing as the restless revolver muzzle settled for a fleeting second on a dead level with his head.

“‘That’s easily explained, but scarcely to you, my man,’ was the retort. It would have gained in force and conviction by the absence of the painful jerkiness of phrasing which characterised it.

“‘Lor’ bless yer ’art, there ain’t no need,’ commented the other cheerfully. ‘I wasn’t borned yesterday, and I knows what an old cock sniffing round a benk vorlt at midnight signifies as well as most, to say nothing of the open cash-box. Put up your pop-gun, cocky. You don’t know how to handle it, and them things is dangerous for amerchewers to mess about wif.’

“‘I’ve got you covered, and I prefer to keep it where it is,’ said the ‘amerchewer,’ with chilling dignity.

“‘Got me covered! S’elp me never! You’ve got the whole bloomin’ benk covered, and the sky what in them is, and the waters under the earth, as they used to give out down Devon way when I was a-stopping there at my country seat for a year or so,’ was the playful retort. ‘Cheese it, guv’nor, lets talk

sense. We're two wrong 'uns of a different breed, and bli'me if I don't think mine is the best.'

"It was a painful position—very painful. Mr. Silas Simcox had inherited misfortune latterly by speculation and other methods, and he had cultivated it with much care and consideration under the singular delusion that he was stemming it, and now he had come to the end of his tether, and had to make a quick decision between two bitter evils. He was a defaulter to the bank in any case, and that meant discredit and prosecution by indignant clients and shareholders in all probability. To default a bit further might with reasonable luck enable him to dodge the latter and to start afresh in a healthier clime. But the alternative meant downright robbery, which is a different thing altogether from simple or compound embezzlement and falsification of books. He could not do it—at least, not then he couldn't. The nearest thing he could get to it was to go down at midnight and look at the cash and notes and negotiable securities. He had gone down accordingly, and it was just when he was about to open the strong-room in furtherance of his strenuous efforts to escape from temptation that he became aware of a witness to his virtue and incorruptibility.

"It was awkward—very awkward, and the worst of it was Mr. Simcox had a habit of soliloquizing aloud, and in the fervour of his strenuous resistance he had soliloquized to a compromising extent.

“What the deuce could he do? Shoot the man and allow it to be assumed that he had done so in defence of the bank’s property and his own life? Scarcely. In the first place, he could not quite see whereabouts he came in on that plan, while subsequent developments might easily serve to put him in an exceedingly unpleasant, not to say dangerous, position. Besides, he was not at all sure about hitting anything useful, and to fire and miss would be fatal, and perhaps painful.

“Mr. Simcox was a sharp man in some things—a regular lightning calculator when his personal welfare was concerned, and this count only served to show a balance of difficulties and dangers that might well have appalled a man of sterner mould than he.

“‘This means penal servitude for you,’ he observed tentatively, moistening the roof of his mouth, and wondering vaguely why that should be so parched while the rest of him was so unpleasantly moist.

“‘All right, guv’nor. I’ve had some of that. We’ll take it together, and I’ll be able to put you up to the ropes a bit,’ was the callous retort. He was a genial rascal evidently, though the crude familiarity set the Manager’s teeth on edge. ‘Look ’ere, old cock, what’s the use of playin’ Pharaoh like this?’ he continued.

“‘Playing Pharaoh!’ stammered Mr. Simcox.

“‘What! don’t know that neither? You’ve got a lot to learn; and you a churchwarding, too. It’s a bit

I got down Devon way along with the rest of my schoolin', explained the other, off-handedly. 'Pharaoh 'ardened 'is 'art, you know, and wouldn't let the gypsies go. That's poetry as well as what Pharaoh did; and you know what happened to 'im then, I suppose? Well! that's our case to a T. You're Pharaoh, I'm the gyp.'

"'I suppose you mean the Israelites,' suggested the Manager; 'but I think I begin to see your meaning.'

"'You ain't such a fool as you look, maybe,' commented the other with kind patronage. 'Well, this is the way of it. Supposin' you 'old me steady and get me lagged. What's that mean to you? I say supposin', 'cause you ain't got me yet; but in any case you're where you was. If I goes free you gets nothin', and a deuce of a lot of explaining to do, which maybe you won't 'ave an answer ready for. If I goes to 'ard, you gets a bit more out of it—seven years, I shouldn't wonder.'

"Mr. Simcox shivered at the callous brutality of the facts thus heaved at him. The worst of it was, he recognised them for the truth in their broader and most essential details, and answer he had none.

"'If, on the other hand, we could come to some friendly arrangement,' continued the burglar, persuasively, 'everythink in the bloomin' garding would be simply scrumptious—for us.'

"'You mean——'

"'A fair divy. I takes half the swag and all the

risk, and you has the rest, and make what you likes of the burglary to cover up what you are afraid of others gettin' on the track of,' explained the burglar. 'It don't seem to me to want much thinkin' about neither. In course in the ordinary way I prefers to work single-handed; but since you're a pal in a 'ole I don't mind lendin' you a 'and—for value received.'

"Again Mr. Simcox shuddered. A 'pal in a hole, and of a common burglar, too! He experimented with the revolver to see if by any chance he could keep it steady for two consecutive seconds. He couldn't; and, moreover, his knees were wobbling to such an extent that he was uncertain how much longer they would sustain him in that undignified, trying, and useless game of bluff. So on short reflection he abandoned it and sank into a chair, while his hand, with the revolver grasped within, found support on the table before him.

"It *was* a nuisance, though! From a pecuniary standpoint all told there was in cash and notes and securities that could be deemed reasonably safe, not to reckon those which had to be classified dubious or downright dangerous, not such a bad picking for one, but of little worth when it came to a division. But then again, the half was a safe half, while the whole involved flight and possible developments. That was a consideration of some importance, and perhaps—Mr. Simcox smiled furtively. How if he could make it a safe whole—take the cash and securities for his share,

and leave the other the glory and reputation—and a coffin.

“It might be done, and the Manager having his wits sharpened by his desperate need, conceived one or two quite likely schemes for accomplishing this end. Supposing, for instance, he could contrive to allure his accomplice inside the safe once again after getting out what he thought he might require, and close the door on him? It was a heavy spring door, massive and close fitting, and well the Manager knew that a man safely trapped there would be unconscious in an hour, and dead long before morning. And in the morning? The story would explain itself—the dullest-witted detective could not possibly fail to perceive its purpose and direction. The treacherous accomplice who had wrought murder in order to obtain the whole spoil instead of sharing it with the dead man would be hunted; but that was of small moment. With grim humour Mr. Simcox smiled to think of offering the hundred pounds reward on behalf of the bank, and increasing it when the full extent of the depredations committed became evident.

“‘Well, guv’nor, *temps fuggits*. How is it to be?’ demanded the burglar, impatient at the delay in the proceedings.

“‘Your proposition strikes me as reasonable,’ replied the Manager, suavely. ‘But, what if you are caught subsequently?’

“‘Arter I’ve got away?’ queried the man, suspiciously.

"Mr. Simcox nodded.

"'Mum as an oyster. If I can't look arter myself, I'll take the penal; but I won't split, s'elp me David,' was the reassuring response; and somehow the Manager believed the man really meant it, and he smiled again. He was observed by his accomplice this time, and something about the twist of the Manager's lips struck the burglar's fancy adversely.

"'I wish you'd keep your mug straight, mister,' he protested. 'You ain't particular 'andsome nohow, an' you've got the beastliest grin I ever seed a cove wear, bar Jim Sloggins, and he was 'anged at the Old Bailey for murder a-top of burglary.'

"The Manager reflected a bit more. It *was* a pity that he was such a coward. He felt that, and although the game was not such a promising one, he would have risked much and paid heavily for the power to keep his pistol arm steady for a few fleeting seconds. He didn't mind robbery, or murder at a pinch; but he could not tolerate the patronising familiarity of his oddly-assorted companion. He was not equal to taking the chances of such a risky game, however, and with an enforced smile he abandoned the revolver, and rose and led the way to the safe.

"It did not take long to have the money out on the Manager's desk, and it was quaint to see the courtly and scrupulous politeness with which he managed the whole business. There was not room for the least suspicion that he was not playing the game fairly.

He divided the spoil with painful exactness, and he explained at length and with calm deliberation the negotiable qualities of this package and the intrinsic value of that until the burglar got restive and ended it summarily.

"He always made a point of sticking to good, honest metal, he explained, and he was not minded to depart now from his, perhaps, unnecessary caution in professional business. The Manager might have them 'to light 'is bloomin' pipe with' for all he cared, and that was the long and short of it.

"Mr. Simcox shrugged his shoulders. It made no difference, particularly under the circumstances, to either of them, and he even went so far as to allow a bigger proportion of hard cash to his accomplice in return for the concession. His nerve failed him for a moment when he got his man back to the safe, but only for a moment. The burglar walked into the safe calmly and unsuspectingly, and the next moment he was caged, and Mr. Simcox breathed again. It was the simplest thing imaginable, but there was no time for jubilation. The morning was drawing on, and heedless of the muffled knocking at the safe door he sat down to do a bit of deft manipulation of accounts.

"This consumed time, and necessitated sundry short pilgrimages in quest of books and documents. Returning from one of these with his work well-nigh accomplished, the gas was suddenly extinguished, and the next minute Mr. Simcox received a heavy blow

from the back which sent him sprawling over a desk and stretched him on the floor dazed and sick.

"As in a dream he heard the chink of metal, a stealthy footfall, and then all was silence and darkness. Staggering to his feet the Manager groped his way across the floor to his desk and lit a match with trembling fingers.

"He should have remembered that burglars are adepts at picking locks, and even the strong vaults of country banks will not hold them in check for long, he reflected. The money was gone, of course, and most of the notes; but the securities and other papers had been left unmolested. That wretched burglar had held the trump card after all, and scooped in the trick.

"Mathews, the old custodian, who had grown grey in the bank's service, appeared on the scene at his accustomed hour the next morning. It was part of Mathews' duty to get out the books and open the safe in readiness for the business of the day. He had done this methodically through long and uneventful years, so that when on this occasion he threw open the doors of the safe and found a rough-looking man asleep on the floor of it, his amazement and consternation may be better imagined than described. For some minutes he stood staring open-mouthed at the somnolent figure, and then an idea began to filter slowly through his brain. The man was evidently a burglar. A closer inspection showed a hole drilled

through the heavy steal doors of the strong room, and the very brace with which it had been accomplished lay on the floor at his feet.

"Though precisely how the hole in the door explained the presence of the man on the wrong side of it, Mathews didn't take time to consider. Casting about in search of inspiration, his eye fell on a heap of stout canvas bags used in the business of the bank, and as quick as it takes to tell he had propped the door open and bagged his captive,



"He stood staring open-mouthed."—*p.* 222.

literally and actually, by drawing a sack over his head and fastening it tight round the middle.

"'Now, my daisy, out you comes, and if I don't get a fiver and something for credit out of this my name ain't 'Enery,' he mused, as he hauled his captive across the floor by the feet and tumbled him into the pantry where the brooms and pails were wont to find lodgment.

“Bolting the door, Mathews returned to the safe to take a note or two, and, as luck would have it, in entering he contrived to start the door, which followed him up closely and snapped fast before he noticed what was happening.

“Not feeling at all well, and preferring for obvious reasons that another should start the ball rolling, Mr. Simcox kept religiously to his own apartments, so that when the senior clerk arrived on the scene he was astonished to find the bank open and not a single official in charge.

“‘Grossly careless,’ he muttered, and then he became aware of a heavy, muffled drumming on the door of the caretaker’s pantry. The key was in the door, and, turning this, he was amazed to find a figure swathed in a sack lying at full length on the floor and banging lustily at the panels with his heels.

“He was none too soon, for the luckless captive was in imminent danger of suffocation, and he was mottled and gasping when the clerk cut the strings and released him.

“In due course explanations ensued, and the clerk could only gasp and ponder and gasp again.

“‘I say, my man, that’s a pretty tough yarn,’ he commented. ‘You surely do not expect me to believe that, finding the bank door open last night, you came in and were attacked by the Manager and imprisoned before you could help yourself?’

‘That’s about the size of it, mister,’ growled the

other, vindictively. 'And I just want to see that Manager of yours, and have a little intervoo with 'im all on my lonesome. I'll about give 'im socks for this frolic.'

"'Rubbish,' retorted the clerk, scornfully. 'You'll have to go back in the cupboard until I can make inquiries. I'm sorry, but—ah! you would, would you?'

"The clerk was young and athletic, and the burglar, who had attempted to make a break for it, found himself unceremoniously caught up and hurled back into the cupboard.

"Locking his prisoner in, the clerk paused awhile to fasten the outer door of the bank, and then went up



"Ah! you would, would you?"—*p.* 225.

to the Manager's private apartments. He got there about the time that Mr. Simcox, unable to stand the suspense any longer, entered the bank premises in time to undo the door for Joskins, the junior clerk,

who was, as usual, late. Joskins apologised, and made his way to the desk, happy to escape the reprimand which he had come to expect as a matter of course by way of a morning salutation from his chief. That morning, however, Mr. Simcox seemed pre-occupied and distraught, and after an aimless glance about the premises he returned to his own rooms.

"Then it was the turn of Joskins to be attracted by curious noises in the custodian's closet, and having an inquiring turn of mind he turned the key and let loose a tornado. Something big and ferocious burst out, and grabbed Joskins up and pitched him back into the closet, locked the door on him, and vanished. It was a painful and bewildering experience; but his captivity was of the shortest duration, for within a brief few minutes the senior clerk, with the Manager in tow, came back to discover the merry game of 'exchange no robbery' that had been going on.

" 'Very extraordinary indeed,' commented the latter, outwardly calm and collected, but in reality feeling as though he had got mixed up in a hopeless, bewildering nightmare. 'Joskins, you had better go and find a constable. I think there must be something seriously wrong here.'

"The constable was found and fetched on to the premises in time to help in the liberation of the luckless custodian, who had contrived by ceaseless hammering to attract their attention.

"The whole thing was 'wrop in mystery,' and was

so complicated by the time an unravelling was sought that a mystery it had to remain. The Manager might have helped a bit in elucidating it, but he was not in a mood to do much to enlighten his colleagues or the police officials. According to his showing, the bank had suffered heavily ; but the sum really stolen was a matter of a few hundred pounds and a bundle of securities, which he dared not utilise, and returned anonymously to himself during the week.

“Mr. Simcox had an interview late one night, by urgent request, and backed by sundry grim threats, with the man who had once regarded him with friendly contempt as a ‘pal in a ’ole.’ He had credited the burglar with the robbery, of course. That worthy also had his views concerning the transaction, and they were of a discontented and somewhat savage nature. Mutual explanations left the precious pair of rogues suspicious of each other, but utterly bewildered ; and the burglar, not being willing to tax his brain in a matter that could bring him no possible pecuniary benefit, accepted a fiver by way of compensation, and left the Manager in solitary possession of the mystery.

“If he would, Joskins could have lent him the key ; but Joskins wouldn’t. Joskins, I regret to relate, was a trifle fast. In fact he might quite justly be termed ‘rapid’ or ‘swift.’ Had the gee-gees on which the misguided youth wasted his salary and savings and the bank’s profits displayed as much

celerity in getting to the winning post, this story would not have been told. But they didn't, and their repeated failure in this respect put the unhappy youth into a desperate, not to say dangerous, position.

"A man requires a steady nerve and tastes of the simplest to pull himself through on a pound a week; with a young fellow of Joskins' temperament it was a sheer impossibility. Joskins didn't even try, and when the effort to settle himself comfortably *viâ* the turf landed him a financial mucker, he was driven to his last resource—the petty cash account. But petty cash is not very sustaining for long, and getting involved by his depredations, and recognising that as hanging was almost inevitable it would be as well and more comforting to perish for a full-grown mutton, he meditated a final coup, and duly proceeded to put the plan into operation.

"That is all; but it is an odd circumstance that, within a month of the robbery, Joskins should have come into a nice little legacy, which, curiously enough, was the same figure within a few pounds as the actual loss sustained by the bank. The windfall seemed to steady him wonderfully, though. He banked it, with his own firm, of course, abjured horses, settled down with matrimony in prospective, and within the year drew one shilling and tenpence in the pound in company with the other depositors when the bank suspended payment."

CHAP. XV.

THE BURGLAR AND THE CHRISTMAS-BOX.

IT was Christmas Eve, and the time of peace and goodwill towards all men; but, for all that, one man there was who felt nothing of its soothing influence, though he accepted his trouble with a certain whimsicality that spoke him as being a merry rogue with human instincts which long years of nefarious living had not entirely blunted.

He stood at an open window on the first storey of a house of considerable size and pretension, and gazed out over the snow-covered landscape, though his chief regard was for an intangible-shaped dark heap that lay curled on the ground right beneath him. And as he gazed he soliloquized.

"Well, if this ain't a bit of all right. There's the blooming ladder, though how it slipped beats me, and here am I, and if a bookie offered to put long odds against my naming the show where *my* Christmas and the next few will be put in, I'd back myself for quod, and make a pot."

It was even so. Mr. William Tutt, *alias* "the Fly," had gone a-burgling, as was his wont, and, ignoring the entirely unseasonable season for such exploits, had entered the house while the family and friends were at the dinner-table, and the servants were all safely out of the way. He had taken much thought and many pains over this job, and as the outcome had gained an entrance by means of a handy rope-ladder. He had designed to make his exit in the same way, but fortune or his own carelessness had been against him, and now, with the party breaking up below and the danger of discovery growing imminent, he had got back to the open window to find that the ladder had slipped from its insecure fastening and fallen to the ground. To jump, the only alternative, meant in all probability a broken leg and subsequent capture; not to jump meant capture, with one slim chance of preserving freedom offering—to find some temporary hiding-place in which to lurk until the small hours would allow him to steal through the house and find a way out through some door or window on the lower floor.

"And they call it Merry Christmas!" quoth Mr. Tutt, with a grim chuckle. "Well, there's no accounting for taste."

The sound of heavy footsteps at this moment brought the burglar's soliloquy to an abrupt close. He had just time to step out on to the verandah and close the window softly behind him, when the room he had left was invaded by two strong men, headed by a

gentleman of miniature stature and antique, not to say snuffy appearance.

"Peering cautiously through the lower pane, the burglar saw the men deposit a curious oblong packing-case on the floor, and pause expectantly, in view of the season and other things.

"Shall we unpack it, sir?" said one of the men.

"No, never mind. I'll see to that," was the answer. "I sha'n't have time to examine it to-night. Here's a Christmas-box for you both, which you'll appreciate better than the one you've brought me."

"Thank you, sir," said the spokesman, touching his cap in gratitude for the silver that was extended to him. "We'll drink your health, me and my mate."

"Now, then, professor, hurry up, or we shall lose that train."

The disturbing voice belonged to a younger gentleman, who appeared on the scene at this juncture struggling into an overcoat as he advanced.

"All right, my boy," said the elder man; "though I'm almost sorry I accepted that invitation. My old friend Bidson, who is out in Egypt, has secured that mummy after all, and has sent it to me as a Christmas-box—the most acceptable I have ever received."

"Oh, is that the mummy? Gad! I should like to have a look at it myself; but we can't stop now, and it will keep for a couple of days longer, I dare say."

"It may, since it has safely survived two thousand

years," agreed the professor; "but I'm going to have it brought over to us."

The next moment the room was vacated, and waiting till the coast was clear, the watcher outside cautiously raised the window and stepped into the room.

"So that's a mummy, is it?" he soliloquized. "Well, I've no use for that sort of cattle, but the case would serve as a mighty fine hiding place, and if I can get it open I'll just chuck his nibs out to cool on that perishing window-ledge and take his place. He won't mind, and maybe it'll get me out of an awkward fix. If the old buck is going away the servants will be all over the house, and keep it up till daybreak. I know them."

Mr. Tutt was a man of action, and, fortunately, as he deemed it, the case proved to be easily forced, being merely fastened by a stout spring lock, which his handy bunch of skeleton keys soon got the better of. He had hauled out the contents, which resembled a bundle of old rags as much as anything, and deposited it outside the window, when he heard footsteps on the landing. He had just time to dodge into the case and lower the lid before his solitude was again disturbed.

"Is that really a mummy, Mr. Jenkins?" said a feminine voice. "Do let us see it; I have never seen one."

"You had one of your own, didn't you?" came the reply, in tones which suggested that the owner was in a surly and captious mood.

"Yes; but this is a gentleman mummy, and mine

was just the ordinary sort—and we generally called her ‘mother,’ not being kids, was the pert retort.

“Well, I can’t do it,” insisted Jenkins. “The guv’nor told me to be very careful and see that it was not touched. It’s been sent from Hegypt by some old buck like himself, as a Christmas-box, and he won’t trust it in the house with us. John has got to harness up the trap and drive over to Lee with it, and I’m to go too, and see the blooming thing don’t get stole. Fine old Christmas I shall have of it!”

“So shall I,” thought the occupant of the case, uneasily; and the dock, which had grown misty and distant, began to loom up again as a quite possible sequel to his adventure.

“Don’t you gals get fooling about with the thing,” concluded Jenkins, threateningly. “I must go and lend John a hand.”

“Grumpy old idiot,” commented the housemaid, as the door closed on the butler. “What a joke it would be if we turned out the mummy and one of us got in in its place.

“Ugh! not me,” said her companion, with a shudder. “It looks too much like a coffin, and master’s that absent-minded that he’d get cutting us up before he found out that we weren’t the proper thing.”

“They don’t cut up mummies, stoopid,” said her fellow-servant, frankly. “They’re worth too much for that. Let’s have a look at it, anyhow. The key is in the lock, and—oh, my, what a funny-looking one it is!”

"Don't touch it, Emma," implored the other. "It's Christmas Eve and all, and it don't seem natural. I wouldn't 'ave the thing in my house at all. It'll bring bad luck."

"Rats!" said Emma, in scorn at this frivolous objection to indulging a curiosity inherent in her sex.

She turned the key and flung back the lid, and the two girls gave vent to a suppressed scream as the mystery of the ages was revealed to their prying eyes.

"Why, it looks just like a man," commented the housemaid. "Fancy him being dead for ever so many thousands of years, and all filled up with pitch and little onions!"



"'Why, it looks just like a man,' commented the housemaid."—*p.* 234.

Not daring to breathe, the burglar lay in a mute endeavour to look as much like a mummy full of pitch and little onions as possible.

"He had ginger 'air," observed the second girl.

"They always 'ad," quoth Emma. "That's what they called them 'Gyptians for; it means ginger. Ain't he ugly? If he belonged to me I'd shove him in the Chamber of 'Orrors at Madame Tussaud's. Lend us your scissors, and I'll cut a keepsake off his head. We can put it under our pillow and work a charm with it, so that we can dream about our young men."

Tutt's failing was vanity, and his weakness was his hair; but he hadn't the courage to protest, and he had perforce to steel himself to immobility while the ruthless scissors of the daring housemaid sheared the wherewithal to work spells.

"I've heard say that if you get a finger or a toe of a dead person and wear it next your 'eart, you can make anyone you wish be true to you," observed the other girl, thoughtfully.

"Well, take one," said Emma, generously. "He's dead enough, and I don't suppose anyone will miss it."

Tutt felt cold chills beginning to invade his spine, and he was weighing the relative advantages of sacrificing a portion of himself to the cause of liberty and springing up and taking advantage of the confusion to make his escape, when Jenkins came back with his assistant, and Emma slammed the lid to and stood demurely to one side as they entered the room.

Jenkins glanced suspiciously at them ; but their faces had a blank serenity which might have passed for innocence, and their attitude was strictly non-committal.

Five minutes later the case was roughly deposited in the trap, and resting on his ear, with his legs sloping up at an acute angle, Tutt had a new Christmas experience from which all the merriment seemed somehow to have got dropped out. With the drivers it was otherwise. The unexpected commission was not entirely to their liking ; but Jenkins, in his capacity as butler and general utility man, had provided mitigating circumstances—in a bottle—and they mitigated the circumstance of a long, cold drive in a proper and seasonable way ; and for variety and companionship they drew up at frequent intervals along the route, and “mitigated” with renewed energy at each.

Under the influence of so much mitigation, Mr. Jenkins became at length decidedly mellow, and lost much of that dignified reserve natural to the old and respected servitor of a prominent scientist. John, having no reserve and very little dignity to handicap him, soon lacked even the capacity to drive a straight course, and at the next Bull of an emerald hue they sighted, he drove the willing steed so recklessly, that they cannoned off the horse-trough, and trap and men and mummy rolled over on the frozen ground together.

“Look after my mummy,” pleaded Jenkins, faithful

to his trust, though absolutely incapable of doing anything personally to safeguard it.

"Where's the woman? Get her out!" excitedly shouted the landlord, who with his servitors and guests had rushed forth at the sound of the smash.

"What woman? There ain't no woman here," retorted a bystander, going round the trap with a match, in case the lady in question had got hidden behind one of the spokes.

"He don't seem as if he'd brought his mummy with him, judging by his state," said another, critically. "My, but he has been keeping up Christmas! I expect the old lady was so proud of him that she got down and ran hard in the other direction, in case anybody got to know of the relationship."

"Where *is* your mummy?" demanded the landlord. "Pull yourself together, man, and don't sit snivelling there."

"In a box—dead, ever so dead," replied Mr. Jenkins, wiping his eyes and breaking into a foolish chuckle.

The bystanders drew back in horrified amazement, and the landlord spoke up sharply.

"Right the trap and lead it round to the stable. This is the coffin, I suppose. Lift it to one side, you fellows, and Bill, go and draw a bucket of water. I've heard a bit in my time, but of all the disgraceful turnouts——"

The arrival of the water checked the innkeeper's flood of just wrath and indignation, and he emptied it

over the maudlin Jenkins by way of a refresher, and sent back for another for John.

No one was hurt, though the trap had a shaft



"He emptied it over the maudlin Jenkins."—p. 238.

smashed, and dripping from head to foot, half-sobered, and chilled to the marrow, the two convivial keepers of Christmas-tide were got into the house, where a proper explanation was deviously and with difficulty arrived at.

The landlord apologized then, but pleaded justification, and the company, being robbed of its first sensation insisted on the minor one of being gratified by a sight of the occupant of the case, which had

added a few thousand years to its age under Jenkins' inapt explanations, and had jumped from the position of obscure priest to one of the greatest dignity and position—a Pharoah at least.

Owing to the cold, the cramped position, and the fall,

Tutt had lapsed into unconsciousness, and he was a really passable and quiescent understudy to a whole army of Pharoahs, when an officious commercial wedged a screw-driver under the lid of his prison and forced the lock.

"Lor, don't it look natural," observed one of the company.

"Might be twin-brother to Bill Bailey," said another facetiously. "Perhaps its Bill himself, and that's why they're asking him to come back."

"Rum taste, then," commented a third. "I'd have buried him straight off, and been glad of the chance, if he had belonged to me—the ugly snipe!"

"He ain't much to look at," agreed the commercial. "I can't see myself why they wanted to do them up and keep 'em about for."

"Saved funeral expenses, I suppose," suggested the landlord. "What does that writing say?"

The commercial leant forward to decipher a crabbed and laboured inscription tacked to the case above the head of the mummy.

"S-i-s-y-p-h-u-s (sizzlyfuss), son of—somebody or other, arch-priest of the Temple of Isis," he began, when there was a sudden interruption. The insufficient student of ancient Egyptology fell back a dozen paces, and the candle with which he had been illuminating the scroll dropped from his nerveless fingers, and set light to the fringe of old Bill Bunting's trousers.

That candle, carelessly held, had worked a miracle,

and a couple of drops of warm tallow dropped in the eye had stirred into vociferous life and activity animation arrested when the world was in its babyhood.

"Where am I? What's up?" queried Tutt, feebly.

The company stood round like a pack of schoolboys caught robbing an orchard.



"'Where am I? What's up?' queried Tutt."—*p.* 240.

The commercial was the first to recover himself.

"Steady on, cocky. You're dead, you know," said he, soothingly.

"You'll be, if you play the fool," said Tutt, meaningly. "Get me a drop of brandy."

"Certainly," said the commercial, obligingly, though with a new tinge of respect in his tone. "You ain't on

the black list, I suppose? Here, landlord, six of neat; or make it a bob's worth, if you like. I'll pay, for one doesn't often get the chance of standing a mummy a lotion. Get me another to drink his health. Merry Christmas to you, old Sizzyfuss, and may you live dead another four thousand years!"

Tutt acknowledged the toast gravely, and, under the influence of the potent spirit, a sense of his position came back to him. He gazed round furtively.

Jenkins, the man of whom he had the most to fear, had fallen back unobserved in the corner in a dead faint. Terror and drink had been too much for him. John was standing at a respectful distance with his mouth wide open, waiting to wake up from an ugly dream and be called to his daily round of menial service.

"I'm a Christmas-box, gentlemen," said Tutt, boldly, stepping out of the case, to the dire consternation of John, who gave a hoarse bellow of fear and rushed blindly out into the night:

"It's a bit of a joke on old Professor Witchern," continued the arch apostle of the jemmy. "He was expecting a mummy from a friend of ours, and we faked a case with me in it, and sent it on ahead. I didn't quite bargain for this, though, or I wouldn't have taken it on. You see, the old chap is spending his Christmas over at Lee, and he left word to have the mummy sent on. You know how it has ended. Those servants of his kept Christmas in style. They began before we left and have

been at it ever since, and if it hadn't been for you the joke might have been a serious one for me. Anyhow, I sha'n't go any further with it. If you can put me up, landlord, I'll stay here to-night."

"It's a pity to spoil the thing," observed the commercial, thoughtfully. "Let's make a straw dummy, and do it up in the case with a 'Merry Christmas' card. We can make those fellows believe that they have had a touch of D. T.'s and send them off with it."

"So we could," said Tutt, enthusiastically. "Look sharp! They haven't seen me properly, so I'll be one of the company and help."

When all was ready, Jenkins was revived, and advised to keep sober and finish his errand before worse came of his intemperate habits.

"But," said he, fearfully, gazing at the ugly-looking case, which was firmly nailed down by then, and secure from curious eyes, "I could have sworn I saw it sit up and speak."

Every one laughed noisily, and a trifle artificially.

"Was it a pink speak you saw?" demanded the commercial. "Look here, old chap, take my advice and a couple of bottles of soda, and get that mummy to your master as soon as you can. We will fake the shaft for you, and if you drive carefully, you can contrive to avoid explaining anything. I should get it mended out of my own pocket, and say nothing about it, if I were you. Anyway, it's Christmas time,

and the old chap won't be hard on you if you do have a bit of an accident on the way back."

Jenkins was only too ready to be persuaded. They found John with his head under the pump in the back yard, swearing off mummies, and drink, and all else, with a curious impartiality as to the direction his subsequent virtuous life took. With reassurances, and bribes, and threats, they got him into the trap, and the two demoralized revellers with their case of mixed mischief drove away into the night, and there ended the story of the burglar and the Christmas-box.

Ended—well, not quite. Tutt, on an early morning train bound for London, counted cash and a miscellaneous assortment of watches and jewellery, and accepted the wish of the station policeman for a merry Christmas in a spirit of subdued gratification.

Everybody at the Green Bull, headed by the commercial, was in a state of vexation and rage, for the understudy of "Sizzlyfuss," instead of joining the Christmas party as arranged, had gone away without paying his bill, and most of the things worth having belonging to the landlord and his guests had gone too.

Tutt believed in making hay while the sun shone, though it was long before he could make the hair shorn away by the scissors of the pert and superstitious servant to grow again; and in consequence of its shade and texture, and his own shady record, when the full story of his exploits at the house he

had burgled and the inn he had looted came to be told in police circles, the trail was somewhat easy and obvious to follow, and the mummy of an evening was again immured, and Tutt's New Year was not so merry as his Christmas had been.

CHAPTER XVI.

BADBURYS DOUBLE.

IT was an extraordinary story that my friend told me! Just between ourselves, I don't believe it. You needn't either, unless you like. My friend did, and he was chaplain at one of the biggest convict prisons, and fairly well versed in slights and subterfuges and curious fragments of unveracious narrative by which gentlemen of pretensions seek to explain at once their presence in such questionable company and their claim to the toleration and pity of all who can feel a stray pang of sympathy for the fate of a martyr to high principle or low intelligence.

Badbury, though he insisted on being a martyr, was not emphatic in claiming title to any special degree of saintliness. He was "in" on a ten years' sentence for embezzlement, fraud, and half-a-dozen minor counts in the indictment in connection with the smash of Badbury's Consolidated Banking establishment.

The point of the story, as my friend gave it to me,

was that this man, Alan Badbury, banker and convict, was not Alan Badbury at all, but his double, and this was the manner of it.

Badbury—I will call him Badbury, though he called himself Benson—was a young man of considerable expectations, which somehow didn't seem to realise. This wouldn't have mattered so much had he not lived on them so recklessly that at the age of seven-and-twenty he found himself hopelessly sunk in debt, devoid of prospects, and so hard pressed that his very lodgings were denied to him by a long-suffering landlady who awaited him night and morning with a bill as long as her tongue. Tailors dunned him incessantly, friends avoided him, and money-lenders were unceasing in their efforts to receive back something on the sums they had advanced him from time to time.

Starting as a medical student, Badbury had confined his efforts to a somewhat fitful attendance at his lectures. Study was not congenial, and the death of his father giving him a few pounds to go on with, and removing the need for making some show of diligence and application, he had resorted to living as best he could on his means first, then on his friends, and then, when these two sources dried up, on his expectations.

Vague expectations coupled with promises, and unbacked by any tangible show of security, will not carry you very far, and so it came to pass that one fateful evening in September found Badbury a fugitive from his debtors in a North bound train speeding out

of London with less than the proverbial shilling in his pockets, and not the slightest idea as to where he was going or what he was going to do.

There was only one traveller besides himself in the carriage, and in the excitement of getting away Badbury had scarcely noticed him; but now that he had settled down for a long, tiresome journey he had leisure to study this man, and at the first scrutiny he almost jumped from his seat. The fellow was the very image of himself! He stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again; but there was clearly no deception. It is said that everyone has a double, and clearly here was his.

The other was huddled up in his corner with his eyes closed in listless apathy. He had taken that attitude soon after entering the carriage. Badbury concluded that he was either very sleepy or mildly drunk, and after the first shock of surprise he accepted the matter of the likeness as being of no concern, and withdrew into his paper.

For quite half-an-hour they travelled in silence like this, until the train lurching over some points as it ran through a station caused Badbury to look up in time to see his fellow-traveller jolt forward and roll in a heap on to the seat. The hideous truth flashed through his mind. The man was dead—heart disease possibly, and syncope induced by hurry or excitement over catching the train.

He crossed the swaying carriage and examined the

unfortunate man, only to find that his surmise was accurate in every essential particular. The man *was* dead, and his slight medical knowledge aided him in coming to the conclusion that he had been travelling with a corpse almost the entire journey.

By what process he was aided by his subsequent purpose is not clear. Possibly the gleam of a magnificent diamond ring the victim wore, coupled with other material signs of wealth and comfort, had something to do with it, in combination with his own desperate straits.

The man was dead without a doubt, and as Badbury noted this fact and the marvellous likeness to himself, some ideas concerning the ironies of life must have flitted through his mind. It might as well have been himself lying there—it would be to all intents and purposes with a little deft interchange of raiment and property. What a sell that would be for his landlady and tailors, and that confounded Jew fellow who called himself a bank and lent money at three hundred per cent. Why shouldn't it be? Gold chain and diamond rings were of no use to this man—and they were to him. He was of no use to any one, on the other hand; and since death receipted all bills in full, why not die and begin life in another capacity, another identity!

There were one or two good reasons why. Badbury knew that; but they were considerations of quite minor importance, or seemed to be.

It was not a pleasant task. Badbury, with a certain

familiarity with it all, could not say that; but it was very necessary, and he smiled at last with a sense of grim humour to think that he who had been waiting for dead men's shoes for so many years, and failed to fit them to his feet, should thus unexpectedly come to stand literally and actually in one dead man's shoes whom he didn't know from Adam and had not the slightest claim upon. The shoes were not the only item. Coat, hat, collar, tie—everything, in fact, that the other wore he changed most carefully and elaborately, and what with the likeness and the garb Badbury's own mother would have sworn to the



"Everything that the other wore he changed."—*p.* 249.

heavy listless figure which the railway officials removed from the carriage at the great junction in the North and deposited reverently in one of the waiting-rooms

Identity was simply and easily established. A soiled card, letters—dunning letters mostly—and bills and miscellaneous memoranda made the way easy for the coroner and his jury, who recorded the fact that

Hilary Benson died from failure of the heart's action, caused probably by hurrying to catch the north express. And so he was buried, unmourned by any save perhaps his landlady, who was brought north to help in the process of identification, and who wept a little for Benson, and a good bit over her unsettled bill for six months' assiduous board, lodging, and attention, to say nothing of small loans and much abuse. The money-lender, who was chief debtor, did nothing so unprofitable, but divided the amount up among the rest of his customers, and it is exceedingly likely that the tailors who were thus victimised by fate charged the account to profit and loss in the same satisfactory manner—satisfactory to themselves, that is, though perhaps not to the next half-dozen men who dropped in for suits and winter overcoats.

Badbury, being thus dead and decently disposed of, travelled leisurely back to Grimsby, from there to Harwich, crossed to the Continent, and after a while left Hamburg for New York.

He had left the train at the first stopping-place after the exchange, partly from motives of prudence and partly because that horribly silent, lifeless replica of himself got on his nerves. It fascinated him so that he was constrained to watch it, though the watching shook his nerve and unsteadied his purpose.

Alan Badbury he was now. The papers in his possession showed him that, and the subsequent details of his journeyings were the outcome of a pencilled

memorandum, which seemed to indicate that it was precisely the ground that the original Badbury had intended covering.

In a hotel at Newark that night Badbury had gone into his situation thoroughly, and the result was to show him that he had made a better exchange than he had hoped for. In his pockets notes and gold showed him to be possessed of upwards of seventy pounds, and in an unobtrusive-looking Gladstone which was part of his outfit he found loot which raised the total to nearly eight hundred. Moreover, in New York someone was prepared to honour a draft up to ten thousand pounds on bearer giving proof of identity.

All this Badbury gathered from the pocket diary of the unknown into whose shoes he had stepped so easily and so complacently. That there was something mysterious about the whole affair he could easily discern, and the more he studied the entries the more odd and intricate it became. The ten thousand pounds at New York was only a part of the fortune he had dropped across. In San Francisco a couple of hundreds were deposited ; in Tokio, in Japan, nearly three thousand. It seemed as though the intention of the original Badbury had been to make a pilgrimage all round the world, and for his aid and convenience he had planted miniature gold mines on the route. In every case the draft was to be honoured to a different name—the same “satisfactory proofs” were to identify half-a-dozen pseudonyms.

But what was that "satisfactory proof?" No indication was given in the diary, and after pondering over the matter for some time Badbury had let it go by default for the time being.

The change from the anxious, badgered life in London to the freedom, novelty, and interest of his present state filled Badbury with absolute contentment. It was the sort of thing he had always wanted—had always expected as a matter of fact—and the next month or two was passed in a state of luxurious enjoyment that made him keen to obtain possession of the wherewithal to continue in it, and with his keenness came some anxiety. On that account he left New York for California, arguing that should he make the attempt to claim the largest sum, which lay in the care of the New York bankers, and fail to satisfy them of his identity, it would be rather difficult to do anything further in the matter. The same applied to the San Francisco agent, only the sum was so comparatively trivial that he could afford to risk it in experiment of finding out what was demanded of himself in the shape of proof.

In a quiet business quarter of the town Badbury discovered the address given in the memorandum, and, sending up his card—printed for the occasion—he obtained an interview with the manager, a hard-faced Yankee with a nasal drawl and an unconcerned manner.

On learning the visitor's mission, this man rapidly turned over some papers and at last came upon the

letter of advice from Alan Badbury authorising payment of the amount lodged to the credit of a Cyril Danton.

"That is all right, Mr. Danton," he observed pleasantly. You have the mark on your arm to show me just as a matter of form and then we can finish this business."

"Mark on the arm! With the words flashed through Badbury's mind the recollection of an odd star-shaped object tattoed on the forearm of the dead man in the train which he had noticed in the gruesome exchange of clothing in the carriage on that fateful night. He pulled himself together and assumed a tone of nonchalance.

"Oh, never mind just now," he observed, carelessly. "I only wanted to know that it was all right in case my funds get short. I am stopping here a bit, and would rather leave the money with you until I go East, if you don't mind."

"Not at all—very pleased to be of assistance," said the other, and after a casual interchange of courtesies Badbury withdrew.

He could scarcely believe in his luck, and most heartily did he commend his habit of observation that had led him to note so exactly though rapidly the odd disfigurement which was clearly the key to substantial wealth.

In his hotel that night, with a pencil and much mental effort he sketched out the device elaborately on a large scale, and the next day he found his way to a man

versed in the art, and had the design transferred to his arm. It was, as near as he could recollect it, perfect, and it proved sufficiently so to pass muster and afford him a fresh supply of money when he presented himself again after a month spent pleasantly about the great fruit-growing State on the Pacific slope.

From San Francisco he turned back by easy stages and finally landed in New York. Business there, he found, was not conducted in quite the free and easy fashion it had been in San Francisco. At the first call he could only succeed in getting an appointment fixed with the head of the concern for the following morning, and when he kept it it was discovered that certain papers necessary to complete the business were missing.

This was of no great concern to Badbury, who lodged his claim, established his identity, and requested that the sum due should be sent up to him at the hotel where he was stopping.

A quiet, mild-looking man who was sitting at the desk writing—one of the clerks or a private secretary, Badbury thought—rose as soon as he had left the room and nodded to the banker.

“Is it the man?” queried the other.

“Alan Badbury himself, without a doubt,” was the response. “Tallies with the description in every particular, and that mark settles it. He’s been a long while getting here. Waiting for the hunt to cool off a bit, I suppose.”

“Nothing more I can do?” queried the banker.

"Poor brute! He seemed cool and unconcerned enough. It means something stiff, I suppose? Do you take him at once?"

"Ten years at the least," said the other, carelessly. "Yes, I shall have him arrested to-night, and get him home as soon as the extradition order is granted."

An hour later, in the corridor of the North Street Hotel, a couple of men confronted the unsuspecting Englishman.

"Pardon me, but are you not Alan Badbury?" said one of them, pleasantly.

Badbury acknowledged the title without a thought of

what it might mean to him, and the next instant was in custody on a charge of embezzlement and fraudulent proceedings in his capacity of managing director of Badbury's, and held to await the decision of the United States Government.

Extradition was granted, and hopelessly bewildered and not in the least understanding his position, Badbury crossed the ocean again, and landed at



"'Are you not Alan Badbury?' said one of them."—*p.* 255.

Liverpool in the custody of the unobtrusive clerk who had sat busily writing, to all seeming, at the desk of the New York bankers.

With the hearing at Bow Street and committed by the Magistrates there for trial at the Old Bailey, Badbury realised his position, and, coming to the easy conclusion that it was better in his case to be a live defaulting debtor than a dead banker accused of criminal practices, he sprang the extraordinary story on the public which filled the papers and caused the proverbial nine day's sensation.

Opinion on the matter was pretty evenly divided, and while one section of the public laughed the story to scorn as a mere puerile invention, the other accepted it with additions which made Badbury out to be innocent of what he was charged with, and guilty only of murder and robbery, while some there were who did not hesitate to brand him with all these crimes and half-a-dozen others.

To add to the complications, and to Badbury's sick disgust, during his absence his expectations had suddenly realised themselves, and while as Badbury nothing save a hard, monotonous life of penal servitude awaited him, as Hilary Benson, a snug and comfortable fortune was his, left unwillingly enough by the foundering of a Channel steamer on the rocks off Jersey, and the subsequent loss of many lives, including that of a wealthy uncle. With him also went the last hope Badbury had of establishing his

identity by knowledge of private family affairs which his uncle could have corroborated.

He made desperate efforts to release himself from the terrible tangle into which he had thrown his life ; but fate and appearances were altogether too strong for him. Even his own solicitor was frankly sceptical, and advised a course of action which seemed possibly more within the scope of credulity, such, for instance, as an unimaginative judge and jury could swallow without detriment to their intellects. To Badbury it only seemed to be an acknowledgment of identity and guilt, for, admitting the identity, there could be no question of the guilt, and a rather weak-kneed plea for merciful treatment.

It was about the most awkward fix a man could possibly find himself in ; but Badbury made a plucky fight for his liberty, even to the extent of calling his former landlady, his tailors, and that money-lender to witness on his behalf. They were rather biassed witnesses certainly—displayed what many thought to be an undue anxiety to identify him with their defaulting debtor ; but all such evidence was discounted in view of Badbury's own admissions, and the facts known of the death of Benson.

Besides, for the few who were ready and willing to admit Badbury's likeness to the unfortunate Benson, there were dozens who swore positively to his resemblance to himself—colleagues, friends, bank officials, and City men with whom he had done

business, and, above all, there was that fatal tattoo marking on his arm. The result was inevitable, and in view of the magnitude and gravity of the offence, and the cunning and deliberation with which it had been carried out, most people considered that Alan Badbury was lucky in the extreme to get off with ten years' hard labour.

Badbury was stunned, speechless, silly. He regarded it all blankly as a grim joke which would eventuate in a roar of laughter and a termination of the jest. Surely these people could not be serious. The assinine nature of the act which had landed him in such a terrible tangle was apparent to him; but singularly enough he could not see that the real facts of the case constituted a serious charge against himself. He had made off with valuable property, and hundreds of pounds which certainly were not his,



"For months he was kept under observation."—p. 259.

and to rob a thief is not legal or moral justification of a crime.

It did not take Badbury very long to realise that there was no jest in the affair, but a solemn, stern, and very hard reality, and with the realisation he collapsed altogether. For months he was kept under observation, a victim to melancholia, with dangerous intervals, and when at last he accepted the inevitable he was just a sullen, silent automaton.

He wore himself out, my friend protested, on his grievance in less than five years, a victim to a too ready desire to put into practice the principles of self-help advocated by the great Dr. Smiles, which, without any other principles of a moral nature, are generally disappointing, and not infrequently dangerous and destructive.

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